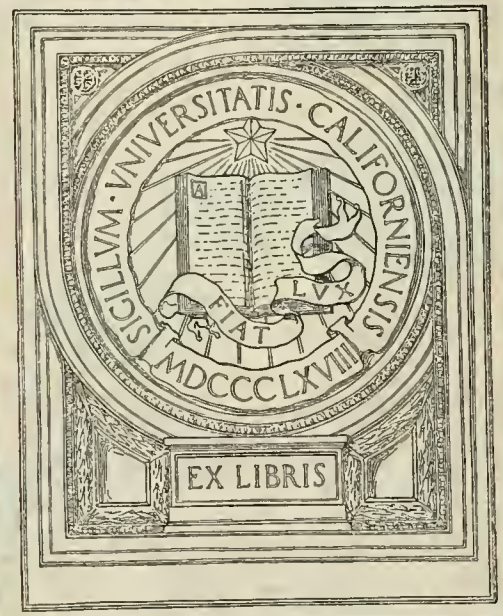
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



IN MEMORIAM
BERNARD MOSES

THE

WORKS

Of the late RIGHT HONORABLE

HENRY ST. JOHN,

LORD VISCOUNT BOLINGBROKE.

VOL. IV.

LONDON:

Printed in the Year MDCCLIV.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA
ATLAS ARCHIVE LIBRARY

1754

CONTENTS.

ESSAYS addreſſed to Mr. Pope.

ESSAY II. Containing ſome reflections on the folly and preſumption of philoſophers, eſpecially in matters of the firſt philoſophy; on the riſe and progreſs of their boaſted ſcience; on the propagation of error and ſuperſtition; and on the partial attempts that have been made to reform the abuſes of human reaſon. Page 3

ESSAY III. Containing ſome farther reflections on the riſe and progreſs of monotheiſm, that firſt and great principle of natural theology, or the firſt philoſophy. 187

ESSAY IV. Concerning authority in matters of religion. 249

21636

ESSAY THE SECOND:

Containing ſome

REFLECTIONS

On the Folly and Preſumption of PHILOSOPHERS, eſpecially in Matters of the FIRST PHILOSOPHY;

On the Riſe and Progreſs of their boaſted SCIENCE;

On the Propagation of ERROR and SUPERSTITION;

And on the Partial Attempts that have been made to reform the Abuſes of HUMAN REASON.

ESSAY THE SECOND.

SECTION I.

HE who aſſerts that there would be more real knowledge and more true wiſdom among mankind, if there was leſs learning and leſs philoſophy may offend ſome men's ears by advancing a paradox; for ſuch at leaſt they will call it. But men who enquire without prejudice, and who dare to doubt, will ſoon diſcover that this ſeeming paradox is a moſt evident truth. They will find it ſuch in almoſt every part of human ſcience, and above all others in that which is called metaphyſical and theological. The vanity of the vaineſt men alive, of ſome who call themſelves ſcholars and philoſophers, will be hurt; but they who ſeek truth without any other regard, and who prefer therefore very wiſely even ignorance to error, will rejoice at every ſuch diſcovery.

There was a time when navigators bent themſelves obſtinately to find a paſſage by the North-Eaſt or the North-Weſt to Cathay. Neither frequent loſſes nor conſtant diſappointment could divert them from theſe enterprizes, as long as the faſhionable folly prevailed. The paſſage was not found; the faſhion wore out, and the folly ceaſed. The bounds of navigation were ſet: and ſufficient warning was both given and taken againſt any further attempts in thoſe dark and frozen regions. Many ſuch there are in the intellectual world: and many ſuch attempts have been made there with no better ſucceſs. But the conſequence has not been the ſame. Neither examples nor experience have had their effect on philoſophers, more fool-hardy than mariners: and where the former wan-

dered to no purpoſe three thouſand years ago, they wander to no purpoſe, at leaſt to no good purpoſe, ſtill.

" Il faut pouſſer à une porte pour ſçavoir qu'elle nous eſt " cloſe," ſays CHARRON ſomewhere in his Book of Wiſdom. He ſays right, " pour ſçavoir qu'elle nous eſt cloſe." But when we know, or may know very certainly, by our own experience and by that of all the ſtrong men in philoſophy antients and moderns, that a door is ſhut which no human force can open, they who continue to ſweat and toil in ſhoving at it are moſt ridiculouſly employed. They who affect to gueſs at the objects they cannot ſee, and to talk as if the door ſtood wide open whilſt they peep through the key-hole, are employed ſtill worſe. The moſt antient philoſophers may be excuſed in great meaſure for attempting to open every door of ſcience; tho they cannot be ſo for impoſing on mankind diſcoveries they never made. But they who followed theſe, in the courſe of philoſophical generations, are inexcuſable on the firſt head as well as the laſt; ſince what was curioſity in the others became preſumption in them: and they ſcarce made amends, by the good they did in advancing ſome real knowledge, for the hurt they did in entailing ſo much that is quite phantaſtical on poſterity.

TULLY confeſſes very frankly that nothing is ſo abſurd which ſome philoſopher or other has not ſaid: and his own works would furniſh ſufficient proofs of the aſſertion, under the epicurean, the ſtoical, and the academical characters particularly, if they were wanted. But this confeſſion does not go far enough: and we may employ upon this occaſion againſt philoſophers the objection made againſt the Jeſuits by ſome of their enemies. The abſurdities of philoſophers are not to be aſcribed to the particular men alone who broached them in every

every philoſophical age, but to their order and inſtitution, if I may ſay ſo; the principles and ſpirit of which lead by neceſſary conſequences to ſuch abſurdities. The firſt founders of philoſophy laid theſe principles, and inſpired this ſpirit in days of ignorance and ſuperſtition. Their followers have refined upon them, confirmed them, and added to them. Time and authority have eſtabliſhed them all: the oldeſt and the groſſeſt moſt. Words that have really no meaning are thought to have one, and are uſed accordingly. Ideas, that are really incomplete and inadequate, are deemed complete and adequate. Ideas, that are obſcure and confuſed, are deemed clear and diſtinct. In a word, time and authority have ſo well eſtabliſhed metaphyſical and theological abſurdities, that they paſs for the firſt principles of ſcience, like certain neceſſary and ſelf-evident truths which are really ſuch. Men, who would have been giants in the human ſphere, have dwindled into pigmies by going out of it. Inſtead of heaping mountains on mountains of knowledge to ſcale the ſky, they heap mole-hills on mole-hills with great airs of importance, and boaſt ridiculouſly not only of their deſign, but of their ſucceſs. They appear to me like ſylphs, if you and ARIEL will give me leave to make the compariſon, ſo proud of not being gnomes that they fancy themſelves archangels. "Humana ad deos transferunt, "divina mallem ad nos," is an expreſſion uſed by TULLY, and extremely applicable to the philoſophers of whom we are ſpeaking. They do moſt preſumptuouſly the firſt, and they pretend with equal folly and effrontery to do the laſt. They aſcribe to the Supreme Being the manner of knowing, the ideas, and even the very affections and paſſions of his creatures. They preſume to enter into his councils, and to account for the whole divine oeconomy, as confidently as they would for any of their own paultry affairs. This they call theology. They build intellectual and material worlds on the hypo-

hypothetical ſuggeſtions of imagination. This they call philoſophy, metaphyſical and phyſical.

By ſuch means, and by ſuch men, truth and error have been intimately blended together from the firſt eſſays of philoſophical enquiry: and various ſyſtems of natural and ſupernatural theology have prevailed in different ages. Had any one of them been wholly founded in real knowledge and confined to it, as every one of them pretended to be, the certainty and the importance of ſuch a ſyſtem would have preſerved it among the rational part of mankind. Truth, pure and unmixed, would have given it ſtability. But error has kept them all in a continual flux: and to the ſhame of the human head and heart, the moſt rational, or the moſt reaſoning, part of mankind has maintained this flux by adopting ſome errors, by inventing others, and by cultivating both.

If there is no ſubject, and I think there is none, upon which the opinions of men have varied ſo extravagantly, and have ſtood in ſuch manifeſt contradiction to one another, as they have on that of the firſt philoſophy, the reaſon is, that men have not aimed ſo much at unattainable knowledge, nor pretended ſo much to it, on any other ſubject. Folly and knavery have prevailed moſt where they ſhould be tollerated leaſt: and preſumption has been exerciſed moſt where diffidence and caution are on many accounts the moſt neceſſary.

" Quale per incertam lunam ſub luce malignâ
" Eſt iter in ſilvis"——

Such is our journey in the acquiſition of knowledge, whenever we attempt to travel far. We grope along in thoſe paths which experience and the application of our minds open to us.

us. We diſcern, according to our manner of perception, a few objects that lie in our way, and we gueſs at a few more. But we cannot even gueſs, with as much probability as is neceſſary to juſtify us in gueſſing, at our whole ſyſtem, nor explain the phaenomena of it. How much leſs ought we to think ourſelves capable of knowing the divine ſyſtem! We have a very ſuperficial acquaintance with man. Do we hope to become better acquainted with GOD? One would imagine that metaphyſical divines did really entertain this hope. They may entertain it, as well as the huffing opinions, to uſe a phraſe of Mr. LOCKE, which they entertain concerning the human mind or ſoul. They aſſume it to be near akin to the divine, ſomething derived immediately from GOD, and capable of being united to him. An intellectual mirror it is, that reflects from the phaenomena of nature alone, and therefore indirectly, ſome very few notices of the Supreme Being, beyond the demonſtrative knowledge that we have of his exiſtence. But theſe men, when they lower their pretenſions and would appear modeſt, aſſume it to be not a mirror that reflects ſuch notices, but a ſpirit that is capable of receiving them, and that receives them directly from the divine intelligence. They tell us, with great metaphyſical pomp of words, that reaſon, the ſupreme, eternal reaſon, is the ſun of their intellectual world, in the light of which they ſee intelligible objects, juſt as ſenſible objects are ſeen in that of the material ſun. On ſuch bold preſumptions they proceed, and whither may they not, whither have they not, been carried by them? The farther they go, the more their imaginary light fails them. But they ceaſe not to flatter themſelves: and whilſt they expect at every moment, as it were, the dawn of a new day, they fall into the ſhades of night.

—"Ubi

—— " Ubi coelum condidit umbrâ
" JUPITER, et rebus nox abſtulit atra colorem."

Now ſince metaphyſical divines have wandered thus ſo many thouſand years in imaginary light and real darkneſs, they are not ſurely the guides we ſhould chuſe to follow. That a degree of knowledge to which I cannot attain is therefore unattainable by them, it would be impertinent to conclude. But I may conclude reaſonably and modeſtly, that a kind of knowledge, whoſe objects lie above the reach of humanity, cannot be attained by human creatures, unleſs they are aſſiſted by ſupernatural powers, which is a ſuppoſition out of the preſent caſe. I could not have diſcovered, as NEWTON did, that univerſal law of corporeal nature which he has demonſtrated. But farther than that he could go no more than I, nor diſcover that action of the firſt cauſe by which this law was impoſed on all bodies, and is maintained in them. It is the kind, not the degree, of knowledge that is concerned, and to be compared. Let us return therefore out of this ſcene of illuſion into that of human knowledge; nor flutter, as HOBBES expreſſes himſelf, like birds at the window whilſt we remain incloſed. We may be the better contented to confine our enquiries to the limits GOD has preſcribed to them, ſince we may find within thoſe limits abundant matter of real uſe and ornament to employ the ſtudious labors of mankind. Experimental knowledge of body and mind is the fund our reaſon ſhould cultivate: and the firſt is a fund that philoſophers will never exhauſt. In this part, let deficiencies be noted. There are, there can be no exceſſes: and as to the exceſſes that have been and are to be noted in the other, they are exceſſes of aſſuming and reaſoning, not of experiment and obſervation. The phaenomena of the human mind are few, and on thoſe few a multitude of hypotheſes has been raiſed, concern-

ing

ing mind in general, and ſoul and ſpirit. So that in this part, the improvement of real knowledge muſt be made by contraction, and not by amplification. I will preſume to ſay, that if our BACON had thought and writ as freely on this as he did on many other parts of ſcience, his famous work, which has contributed ſo much, would have contributed more, to the advancement of real knowledge, and would have deſerved it's title better. Men might have learned to conſider body more, inſtead of doubting whether it exiſts, and to conſider their own minds more, from which alone they can acquire any ideas at all of mind; inſtead of dreaming like MALEBRANCHE that they interrogate the divine LOGOS.

What right the firſt obſervers of nature and inſtructors of mankind had to the title of ſages we cannot ſay. It was due perhaps more to the ignorance of the ſcholars, than to the knowledge of the maſters. But this we may venture to affirm, that their right to that appellation could not be worſe founded than the right of all their ſucceſſors to be called lovers of wiſdom. There is an anecdote related by TULLY in his fifth Tuſculan, and mentioned, I think, by DIOGENES LAERTIUS, which is much to our preſent purpoſe: or at leaſt the tale is pretty enough to deſerve to be told. The prince of the Phliaſians having heard and admired the Samian, aſked him what his profeſſion was. He anſwered, that he was a philoſopher, and he explained himſelf thus: He ſaid, that the life of man ſeemed to him to reſemble the great aſſembly or fair of Greece that was held at Olympia, where ſome reſorted to acquire honor by exerciſing themſelves in the public games, and others wealth by traffic; whilſt another ſort of men came for a much better reaſon, to ſee and to obſerve whatever paſt. Thus, he ſaid, ſome men come into the world to ſeek glory, and ſome wealth; whilſt a few, deſpiſing both, obſerve and

ſtudy nature: and theſe are lovers of wiſdom. We might be induced by this tale to think that PYTHAGORAS confined himſelf within the bounds of real knowledge, if we did not know, by a multitude of other anecdotes, and by the ſcraps of his doctrine that have come down to us, how far he rambled out of them. He had been bred in ſchools where the diſtinction between human and divine knowledge and wiſdom, to one of which we may attain, but not to the other, was ſo little made, that by aiming at the laſt, they miſſed in many reſpects even the former. To obſerve the conſtitution and order of things in the phyſical and moral ſyſtems to which we belong, to form general ideas, notions, axioms and rules on theſe particulars, and to apply them back again to human action and human uſe, conſtitutes knowledge: and the reſult of the whole is wiſdom, human knowledge and human wiſdom. But there are men, and there were ſuch in the days of PYTHAGORAS, who talk of wiſdom as if it was not the reſult of any procedure of this kind, but a ſuperior principle antecedent to it, independent of human knowledge, and the influences whereof deſcend on the human mind from above, as chriſtian theology teaches us that grace and faith are beſtowed on us.

According to ſuch philoſophers as theſe, men of great authority in our learned world, we muſt date the progreſs of knowledge and wiſdom from ADAM, who was the wiſeſt of men, if it be no blunder to ſay ſo, before the fall, and the firſt and greateſt philoſopher after it. I will not miſpend any time in collecting the puerilities and prophanations that have fallen from the pens of rabbins, and antient and modern doctors of the chriſtian church. It will be enough, and in truth more than the ſubject deſerves, to take notice, that if we give credit to theſe writers, we muſt believe that wiſdom was infuſed into the mind of ADAM by GOD, and that he came out

out of the hands of his Creator with all the perfections of which his nature was ſuſceptible: and of what perfections was not that nature ſuſceptible, whilſt he enjoyed the viſion of GOD, and whilſt the Supreme Wiſdom, that is GOD himſelf, "for the WORD is GOD," was pleaſed to converſe with him, and was delighted in his company *? He had not only innate wiſdom, but innate language too; for ADAM and EVE diſcourſed together in Hebrew as ſoon as they were created. Even after the fall, ADAM preſerved all the knowledge and wiſdom whereof he was in poſſeſſion, tho more obſcurely than before; becauſe he had no longer the ſame immediate and intimate communication with the Supreme Intelligence. It ſhould ſeem too, that he tranſmitted ſome faint glimmerings of theſe original illuminations to all his poſterity. PLATO imagined, after more antient philoſophers, that every man is born with a certain reminiſcence, and that when we ſeem to be taught, we are only put in mind of what we knew in a former ſtate. Now who can tell how high this reminiſcence began, and through how many former ſtates it may have been continued! Several chriſtian divines have taught, that all men having been contained in the firſt man, ſome of his original perfection has deſcended to them, as well as the taint of his original ſin: and we may conceive one, no doubt, as eaſily as the other.

But however all this may have been, and whether ADAM preſerved after the fall his whole ſtock of knowledge and wiſdom, or whether he renewed it by experience and meditation in the courſe of a long life, the progreſs of knowledge and wiſdom is deduced by the ſame writers from him to SETH, to ENOCH, to NOAH, to the patriarchs, to MOSES, to SOLOMON, to the elders of Iſrael, to the prieſts of the family of AARON, to the

* —ludens in orbe terrarum; & deliciae meae, eſſe cum filiis hominum. Prov. c. 8. v. 31.

colleges of the prophets, to thoſe ſanctified orders the Rechabites and the Eſſenians, and in ſhort to all the ſchools of the choſen people both before and after the captivity. Among this people we are told moſt dogmatically, that the whole treaſure of knowledge and wiſdom, as well as of true religion, was depoſited by GOD, that it was preſerved there, and that ſome of theſe riches were diſtributed from thence at different periods of time to the reſt of mankind: ſo that the people of the whole earth lighted up their candles at the lamp of the tabernacle. JOSEPH is ſometimes the antient HERMES, MOSES the younger. Nay JOSEPH is ſometimes the fifth MERCURY, mentioned in ſeveral traditions, who gave laws to the Egyptians, and taught them letters: and MOSES was the fourth, whom they thought it criminal to name on account of the plagues they had endured at the famous exode. By theſe men, the light of philoſophy was ſpread in Egypt. DANIEL, ZOROBABEL and others of the captive Jews ſpread it in Chaldaea: and SOLOMON had ſpread it, long before, among his neighbours the Phoenicians, who left ſome ſparks of it in all the countries to which theſe famous navigators ſailed.

This account of the riſe and progreſs of philoſophy, with a multitude of other circumſtances, is ſo inconſiſtent and ſo unauthorized, or rather ſo groſsly fabulous, that they who give credit to it muſt firſt renounce all the conditions of hiſtorical probability. JOSEPHUS, EUSEBIUS, CLEMENT of Alexandria, and others, both Jews and Chriſtians, laid the foundations of the whole legend, and dreſſed up different parts of it. Modern ſcholars, like BOCHART, HUET, STILLINGFLEET, and many more, have taken a great deal of ridiculous pains to ſupport it. I ſhall not enter at this time into any particulars concerning the proofs they bring. I will only ſay, that, by the ſame methods, it will not be difficult to make antiquity depoſe

poſe juſt as we pleaſe. If we affirm, as it is done in the preſent caſe, without even any ſeeming authority; if we connect at other times broken, and ſupply imperfect paſſages by gueſs; and if we paraphraſe ſuch as are obſcure, till we make them ſay what there is no reaſon but the reaſon of our ſcheme to believe they were intended to ſay; in ſhort, and to mention no more of theſe learned artifices, if we adopt ſuch anecdotes as ſuit our purpoſe, and reject ſuch as are not favorable to it, tho derived from the ſame or equivalent authority, no hiſtorical paradox will want ſufficient color to make it paſs for truth, at leaſt among thoſe who have, as the writers above-mentioned had, ſome favorite purpoſe to ſerve by it.

That arts and ſciences travelled from the Eaſt to the Weſt, from Chaldaea to Egypt, and from Egypt to Greece, has been a received opinion:

"Tradidit Ægyptis Babylon, Ægyptus Achivis."

This opinion agrees ſo well with our ſcripture account of the re-peopling the world after the deluge, and of the antiquity of nations, that it ought to be retained perhaps for that very reaſon. Two writers of more fame than good authority, but who are principally depended upon by modern antiquarians, ſeem to have thought ſo. JOSEPHUS relates, that ABRAHAM was enriched by the immenſe preſents the Ægyptians made him for inſtructing them in the ſciences that he brought from Chaldaea. EUSEBIUS aſſures us, from the ſame JOSEPHUS, that the Egyptians were ignorant of aſtrology and even of arithmetic, and from EUPOLEMUS, that ABRAHAM converſed, whilſt he was in their country, with the prieſts of Heliopolis. But notwithſtanding all the authorities on which this received opinion is founded, a man of ingenuity and much reading would not find it hard to eſtabliſh another, by a new choice of

of paſſages, and by a new diſpoſition of them; for the learned ring different changes on the ſame ſet of bells. He might ſhew us perhaps, that arts and ſciences came from the Weſt in a more remote age than any the Greeks had knowledge of, that they were introduced and ſpread by the Atlantic people who over-run Africa and Europe, and of whom SOLON had never heard till the Egyptian prieſts related theſe wonders to him; or he might bring them perhaps from the kingdom of Uranus, that kingdom to which ATLAS, coeval with SATURN, and his brother, according to DIODORUS SICULUS, gave his name; if in truth the people of that kingdom were different from the others who bore the ſame name, which point of criticiſm it might be more difficult than important to ſettle, ſince in all caſes arts and ſciences would ſtill have been brought from the Weſt to the Eaſt. After this, it would be eaſy to tranſport them from Ethiopia, the African Ethiopia, or Egypt to more eaſtern nations, to the Phoenicians, the Aſſyrians, the Perſians, the Indians and the Chineſe.

SECTION II.

BUT to dwell no longer on theſe ſerious trifles, let us conſider whether the riſe and progreſs of philoſophy, eſpecially of the firſt, may not be accounted for with a probability that is founded on the general tenor of tradition, and on the analogy with what we know of nations that have grown up from barbarity to civility, and from ignorance to knowledge.

I think then, on both theſe foundations, that philoſophy neither had, nor could have, in the ordinary courſe of things, a ſtated beginning at any point of time, nor in any particular place.

place. It began, at different periods, in different places, and was ſubject to all the revolutions that attend the human ſtate. It was the growth of ſome countries, it was propagated into others. It floriſhed long in ſome countries, it languiſhed and was ſoon at an end in others. It thrived more or leſs, it lived and died according to the characters of people and the fortune of governments. Wherever it began, the beginnings of it were inconſiderable; for the trees which compoſe the grove of knowledge ſhoot up from the ſmalleſt ſeeds. Nor was this all. The imperfections of our nature, which have manifeſted themſelves in the whole progreſs of philoſophy, manifeſted themſelves no doubt even more groſsly at the riſe of it, tho ignorance concealed them at that time, as knowledge has diſguiſed them ſince. Ignorance preceded knowledge. Error was coeval, and grew up with it. Error floriſhes in ſhades, and before men could get out of thoſe which ignorance ſpread, error had outgrown and overſhadowed knowledge. Superſtition accompanied them: and tho error was the principal nurſe, even knowledge contributed to rear this child of ignorance and fear.

It is agreeable to antient traditions, and modern relations, to believe, that wild uncivilized people, tho reduced into ſocieties ſubject to ſome regulations of government, and directed by ſome general rules which conſtant experience forces them to obſerve, have few means and little leiſure to improve even in that knowledge, the foundations of which are already laid by urgent neceſſity among them, and which would render their ſtate, if it was improved, much more comfortable. Their whole time is employed, the whole attention of their minds is bent to provide from day to day, and from ſeaſon to ſeaſon, for their ſuſtenance: and the exerciſe of reaſon appears as little in them as in the beaſts they ſometimes hunt, and by

by whom they are ſometimes hunted. Arts lie uninvented or unimproved, and ſcience they have not. But the firſt openings to ſcience, and the firſt motive to philoſophical enquiries, they have even in the ſtate I deſcribe: and this motive ſhews itſelf in that curioſity to know the cauſes of the phaenomena, which is ſo natural to the human mind. The moſt common excite it. Thoſe that are extraordinary excite it more, and thoſe from which they receive much benefit or much hurt excite it moſt of all. Another principle, as natural to the human mind, but not very apt to direct our enquiries right, is that whereby we make ourſelves the meaſure, as well as the final cauſe of all things. It is this that has repreſented the unknown cauſes of the ordinary as well as extraordinary, of the beneficial as well as hurtful phaenomena of nature to the minds of ſuch ſavages and demi-ſavages as we deſcribe, under the images of animal beings, a little different from man, but analogous to him, and endued only with greater power and greater intelligence. Theſe they placed above or below, according to the different ſcenes of action to which imagination aſſigned them; like the captain above and the captain below, the two divinities of the Hottentots. Thus the heaven, the earth, the ſea and the air were ſoon peopled with divinities that directed all their motions, and directed them all relatively to man. Unable to diſcover the order of ſecond cauſes, to trace thoſe that are remote from thoſe that lie neareſt to our obſervation, and thoſe that are more general from thoſe that are leſs ſo, which would have led them at laſt to the firſt efficient cauſe of all things, they took a ſhorter and eaſier method of accounting for appearances, by aſcribing every one to ſome particular efficient cauſe. Thus they made gods as many as they wanted; and having once made them it became equally unneceſſary to look after intermediate, and impious to ſuppoſe any ſuperior cauſes. It thundered: JUPITER was angry. It lightened: he darted

one

one of his fiery bolts at ſome devoted head. What would curioſity deſire more to know * ?

I MIGHT

* If ignorance and fear were the two firſt ſources from which polytheiſm and idolatry aroſe, flattery was in proceſs of time another; or that which was gratitude originally, degenerated into flattery. Men who had been honored for the good they did during their lives [a], or admired for their great actions, were adored after their deaths [b]. This cuſtom was extended ſo far, that in ſome countries [c], not only public benefactors and heroes and kings were deified, but every private man worſhipped thoſe to whom he had been particularly obliged [d]. Thus it was that the Egyptians came to have whole dynaſties of gods and of demi-gods [e]. The fame of OSIRIS, whenever he lived, had been great: and the veneration of his ſubjects for him was ſuch, that they gave his name to their gods, or aſcribed the names of their gods to him [f]. Some have imagined, and among them Sir J. MARSHAM, if I remember right, that his whole family and his whole court had their ſhare of divine honors. That as his ſiſter, who was his wife too, followed him to heaven under the name of ISIS, ſo the preſident of his council became the god of arts and eloquence, under the name of MERCURY: and the general of his troops was the patron of magnanimity and military virtue, under that of HERCULES: nay that his brother and his ſons were no more forgot by the prieſts, than BUSIRIS and ANTAEUS, the governors of two of his provinces, have been by the poets. SESOSTRIS furniſhed the ſame matter to fables, many generations afterwards: and learned men think that ſeveral of thoſe in HOMER may be traced up to this famous expedition. Theſe deifications gave occaſion to the hymns that were made and ſung, not only as parts of divine worſhip, but as neceſſary means to preſerve the memory of great events. TULLY ſays ſomewhere, that the funeral orations in uſe at Rome had corrupted hiſtory; becauſe hiſtorians, in the dearth of materials, had taken ſuch as they found in thoſe rhetorical panegyrics. How much more muſt ſuch hymns have corrupted both hiſtory and religion? The ſimplicity of true theiſm could never ſubſiſt in the figures of poetry. Affected inſpiration paſſed for real, hyperboles were underſtood literally, and the machinery of an ode was taken for matter of fact.

MEN grew fonder of polytheiſm by another cuſtom that prevailed. Every ſect framed a new liſt of gods, or gave new names to antient divinities: and altho in ſome places temples were opened to the whole rabble of the ſky, yet in others the gods ſeemed to be reduced to a ſmaller number, and every nation was fond to have it believed, that the deities they worſhipped, belonged in a peculiar manner to their country and to them. The birth of BACCHUS, for inſtance, had been claimed by ſeveral nations of Aſia and Africa, when ORPHEUS applied to the

[a] Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

[b] Hic eſt vetuſtiſſimus referendi bene merentibus gratiam mos, ut tales numinibus aſcribant. PLIN. l. 2.

[c] Aethiopia. vid. STRAB. l. 17.

[d] Quamobrem major coelitum populus etiam quam hominum intelligi poteſt, cum ſinguli quoque ex ſemetipſis totidem deos faciant, Junones, Genioſque adoptando ſibi. PLIN. ubi ſupra.

[e] Suſcepit autem vita hominum conſuetudoque communis, ut beneficiis excellentes viros in coelum famâ ac voluntate tollerent. Hinc HERCULES, hinc CASTOR et POLLUX, &c. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

[f] Haec arte POLLUX, & vagus HERCULES innixus arces attigit igneas. HOR.

I MIGHT illuſtrate what has been ſaid by numerous examples, if I affected, what I eſteem very little, particular and critical

ſon of SEMELE the fables he had learned in Egypt concerning another BACCHUS, and inſtituted in honor of this new divinity, the orgia and religious ceremonies he had ſeen practiſed in honor of others more antient, of the ſame name and profeſſion, if I may uſe the term. It would be impoſſible to enumerate, not only all the different gods, but even all thoſe that were worſhipped under the ſame appellation; for VARRO, I think, reckoned at leaſt three hundred JUPITERS.

BUT before I leave this head, I will mention very ſhortly, one or two ways more, by which theſe ſuperſtitions received increaſe, ſince they occur readily to my mind. Miſtake and involuntary error was one, involuntary in the generality, tho often impoſed, ſometimes helped, and always connived at, by the pious frauds of the prieſthood. The legend of Dodona related, that two black doves took their flight from the Egyptian Thebes, one into Lybia, the other into Greece; that the firſt ordered the temple of JUPITER HAMMON to be founded, and that the latter, perching on a tree at Dodona, and ſpeaking in the human voice, declared it to be in the fates, that another oracle of JUPITER ſhould be eſtabliſhed there. The fact was atteſted by all that belonged to the temple, and the miracle paſſed currently. But the prieſts of the Theban JUPITER, who had no intereſt in this particular ſuperſtition, and with whom HERODOTUS converſed when he was in Egypt, explained the blunder and the fraud to him. Some Phoenician rovers, it ſeems, had carried off two prieſteſſes, and ſold one into Lybia, and the other into Greece, where they ſet up oracles on the model of that which was in their own country. BOCHART has ſhewn how affinity of ſounds, which gave occaſion to the Greek poets to call the prieſts Doves, might give occaſion to this fable: and Sir J. MARSHAM cites a paſſage in HOMER, where doves are ſaid to carry ambroſia to JUPITER. Let me ſay, by the way, that BOCHART might have learned from hence, how precarious a foundation for conjecture ſimilitude of ſound is, on which however, many of his conjectures reſt principally.

THAT I may compare this antient, with a modern, inſtance of impudent fraud and fooliſh credulity, let me mention among many, one that prevails at this time even in France. It is believed then in that country by devout perſons, that ſome holy man had formerly a revelation in a viſion or a dream, directing a monaſtery to be built, and founded in a particular field, which was ſhewn to him. The good man publiſhed this revelation: a bigot age believed him: the monaſtery was founded, and a new order of lazy drones was added to the church. Their firſt and all their other monaſteries were richly endowed: and they continue to this day under a name that marks their ſuppoſed divine inſtitution, the name of Premontrè.

IF ſuch groſs lies could be impoſed, if plain matters of fact could be thus perverted to foment ſuperſtition, what errors muſt have ariſen to have the ſame effect

critical knowledge of the anecdotes of antiquity. It is enough for me to have read and conſidered them ſo far, as to ſee ſome general truths that reſult from them. I procced therefore in the ſame manner to obſerve, that many antient traditions might induce one to think, that the unity of God was the original belief of mankind, and that polytheiſm and idolatry were the corruptions of this orthodox faith. CUDWORTH ſeemed to me to have eſtabliſhed this opinion on as good foundations as any opinions of this ſort can reſt, and I own that I once very much inclined to it. But when it is conſidered more cloſely, and without prepoſſeſſion, I apprehend that it can be ſupported neither by ſacred nor by prophane authority.

NOT by ſacred; becauſe the Moſaic account is plainly inconſiſtent with itſelf, as it ſtands in the books we have under the

effect from the uſe of hieroglyphics, ſymbols, and allegories, wherein phyſical and moral philoſophy were delivered down to poſterity? If naked truth, paſſing through many hands, came to be diſguiſed, what muſt have happened to truth, wearing a maſk at her firſt appearance? The hieroglyphic and the ſymbol remained, and the fable continued in tradition, when the ſignification of the one, and the moral of the other, were forgot. Books, which treat of antient mythology, furniſh many inſtances of this kind. I will mention two out of DIODORUS SICULUS, as examples of another way, whereby ſuperſtitious opinions and practices encreaſed among the heathen. PALLAS was a virgin, born out of the head of JUPITER. She was a goddeſs, famous in many reſpects; and we ſee of what conſequence her ſtatue was in the Trojan war [a]. Now the antient naturaliſts meaned to expreſs, by this daughter of JUPITER, nothing more than the air, uncorrupted, and holding the ſublimer place among the elements. Thus again, as the Romans carried the eagle, ſo the Egyptians carried the images of divers beaſts in their enſigns [b]. Theſe images, which were preſerved only as monuments of their triumphs, came in time to be adored as authors of their victories. The dog, which ANUBIS, and the wolf, which MACEDON, wore on their ſhields or on their helmets, after having been long honored as emblems of theſe demi-gods, came to be gods themſelves. From ſome ſuch originals, might proceed many other monſtrous objects of adoration,

——— qualia demens
——Aegyptus portenta colit—— JUV.

[a] DIOD. SIC. l. 1. [b] Ib. l. 2.

name of MOSES. Not by prophane; becauſe thoſe anecdotes are quite unfavorable to this opinion, and becauſe every probable reaſon that can be drawn from the conſtitution of human nature, and from the ordinary proceſs of the human mind, ſtands in direct contradiction to it.

METHUSALEM, it is ſaid, ſaw both ADAM and NOAH, to both of whom God revealed himſelf in his unity. SHEM, the ſon of NOAH, lived even to the days of ABRAHAM. Need I ſtay to ſhew how impoſſible it is for any man in his ſenſes to believe, that a tradition derived from God himſelf, through ſo few generations, was loſt among the greateſt part of mankind, or that polytheiſm and idolatry were eſtabliſhed on the ruins of it in the days of SERUG, before thoſe of ABRAHAM, and ſo ſoon after the deluge? I ſhould think it impoſſible even for the Jews themſelves, who ſwallow ſo many fables and ſo many anacroniſms. Since the unity of God was not univerſally taught in thoſe early days, it was not ſo revealed, nor preſerved in the manner aſſumed.

IF the inconſiſtency of this account makes us reject it, we ſhall find leſs reaſon to believe, on the authority of prophane traditions, that the unity of God was the primitive faith of mankind. Revelations to the Father and to the Reſtorer of the whole human race, might have eſtabliſhed this faith univerſally: but without revelation it could not be that even of any one people, till obſervation and meditation, till a full and vigorous exerciſe of reaſon made it ſuch. By conſidering the phaenomena ſeparately, men could not arrive at a knowledge of the one Supreme Being: and ſuch men, as we ſpeak of, were not capable of taking an entire view of the harmony of the whole.

WRITERS

WRITERS are apt to talk of general conſent, as if it proved in all caſes, that opinions ſo conſented to, have a real conformity, and bear a real proportion, to the univerſal reaſon of mankind. Thus in TULLY, there are ſome attempts to prove the truth of polytheiſm. Thus a modern philoſopher and divine * attempts to prove, that the belief of inviſible ſpirits, employed in directing the affairs of this viſible world, is founded in "natural inſtinct and the evidence of reaſon." It would be eaſy to ſhew, in a multitude of inſtances, that if this poſtulatum be admitted, things manifeſtly falſe muſt paſs often for true, and things demonſtrated true, for falſe. Even the exiſtence of a firſt intelligent cauſe, the very unity of God, of which we are ſpeaking, muſt be owned to want this pretended criterion of truth. But if univerſal conſent be not neceſſary to eſtabliſh this demonſtrated truth, how much leſs neceſſary is it, that this ſhould have been the primitive belief of mankind? Polytheiſm and idolatry are repugnant to right reaſon, that is, to the concluſions that reaſon draws from ſufficient information, and from the combinations and compariſons of real, not phantaſtic ideas and notions. But polytheiſm and idolatry have ſo cloſe a connection with the few ſuperficial and ill-verified ideas and notions of rude ignorant men, and with the affections of their minds, that one of them could not fail to be their firſt religious principle, nor the other their firſt religious practice.

THERE is ſo little prophane authority for aſſerting the contrary, that if the paſſages, produced to prove it, were more direct, and more numerous and uniform than they are, they would not prove it to any one who gives as little credit to our

* THOMASSIN. Met. d'etudier &c. la philoſ.

very

very beſt ſyſtems of antient chronology as they deſerve. Suppoſe it clearly proved by ſome of theſe paſſages in any one inſtance, that the unity of God was the primitive belief, the term primitive will be equivocal, and the proof precarious. For how ſhall we be aſſured that we ſee clearly in the midſt of chronological darkneſs, which is always thickeſt the further we go back, that this orthodox faith was not preceded among the ſame people by polytheiſm and idolatry, as we ſhall certainly find that it was ſucceeded by them? The whole world appears, as ſoon as we come into hiſtorical light, over-run with them. The vulgar embrace them eaſily, even after the true doctrine of a divine unity has been taught and received, as we may learn from the example of the Iſraelites: and ſuperſtitions grow apace and ſpread wide, even in thoſe countries where chriſtianity has been eſtabliſhed, and is daily taught; as we may learn from the examples of the Roman churches, to ſay nothing of the reformed, who are leſs liable to the objection. But ſtill it remains true, that the belief of one Supreme Being may be eſtabliſhed on the ruins of polytheiſm and idolatry. In fact it hath been ſo, in hiſtorical ages. Why ſhould it not have been ſo in that dark age, which preceded even the fabulous age, according to VARRO's diſtribution of them? In the Theban dynaſty, the Supreme Being was piouſly adored under the name of Kneph, and the people of it were ſo far from any idolatrous worſhip, that they refuſed on this account, as rigid Jews or Chriſtians might have done, to contribute to a tax raiſed in Egypt, and applied to repair the temples, the images or pictures, and other inſtruments of idolatry. Now the Theban was the moſt antient dynaſty of Egypt: and the Egyptians were the moſt antient people of the world: the firſt men therefore were unitarians, not polytheiſts. But how can this concluſion ſtand, when the premiſes neither have been, nor can be proved; when there may have been

been dynaſties more antient than this, or various revolutions of religion in this very dynaſty; and when I have much more reaſon to believe, on the reaſon of the thing, and on a general analogy to what has happened in other countries, that the firſt men were polytheiſts, than any ſcholar has, on the precarious authority of a broken tradition or two, to pronounce them orthodox on this article of their faith? In ſhort, there is, I think, no ſufficient grounds on which to believe, that natural theology was taught in its purity firſt, and corrupted afterwards; whereas reaſon and obſervation both make it probable, that it has fared with the firſt philoſophy as with every other part of ſcience, that is, much error has been mingled ſometimes with a little knowledge, and eſpecially in the beginnings of men's inquiries into nature; and that at other times in the progreſs of theſe inquiries, where any progreſs has been made, more or leſs knowledge has been acquired with a leſs proportion of error. Conſcious of human weakneſs and dependency, men have acknowledged in the infancy of philoſophy, and even before the birth of it, power and intelligence ſuperior to their own, ſuch as made the world, or ſuch at leaſt as governs it. This was knowledge. But error grew up with it. They adored the viſible objects that ſtruck their ſenſes, or at beſt the inviſible beings that they aſſumed to reſide in them. The rational, the orthodox belief, the firſt true principle of all theology, was not eſtabliſhed, nor could be ſo, till the manhood of philoſophy.

The progreſs of this manhood was every where ſlow, and in ſome countries none appears to have been ever made. On the contrary, men continued from age to age in the ſame ſtate, which may be properly called a ſtate of natural error and ſuperſtition. Such nations, like changelings or naturals, may be ſaid to have been children to their death. But in others

others this progreſs was made, and favorable combinations of circumſtances helped to quicken it, in ſome more, in ſome leſs; but in all much more to the improvement of uſeful arts, and of other ſciences, particularly of government, than to the inveſtigation of truths concerning the firſt philoſophy. We read, with a juſt admiration, the accounts that are come down to us, ſhort and imperfect as they are, of the wiſdom and policy of antient nations, of the eaſtern empires, and particularly in HERODOTUS and DIODORUS SICULUS, of the Egyptian government. All the arts and ſciences were carried far among them, ſeveral much further than we are able to imitate; and if we judge of their improvements in other ſciences, as we may fairly do, by thoſe which they made in aſtronomy, we ſhall find reaſon to be of opinion, that theſe ſunk inſtead of riſing in the hands of the Greeks, notwithſtanding their boaſts, and thoſe of PLATO particularly, that they improved all they learned; as we ſee that the knowledge of the true ſolar ſyſtem was loſt ſoon after the days of PYTHAGORAS, and made way for the falſe one of PTOLEMY. But when we conſider the ſtate of natural theology among the ſame nations, and at the ſame time, we admire no longer; we remain aſtoniſhed, that men who excelled in every other branch of knowledge, ſhould embrace ſo many abſurd errors in this, and deduce from their philoſophy a ſyſtem of religion that rendered them a proverb, even among polytheiſts and idolaters. To give a full account of this, would be to give an hiſtory of the progreſs of the firſt philoſophy. I ſhall touch the principal heads as ſhortly as I can; and indeed the greateſt ſcholars when they pretend to do much more, to enter into a detail of particulars, and to treat this ſubject minutely, involve themſelves and their readers in webs of hypotheſes, one generally as improbable as another, and none of them of any real uſe. They ſhew much learning, as it is called, and often much

much ſubtilty, and this is all they ſhew that deſerves any commendation, if even this deſerves it. I refer you therefore to them, if you are deſirous to ſee more particulars than you will find here, concerning the riſe and early progreſs of Pagan theology and worſhip.

Among people immerſed in ignorance and ſuperſtition, there aroſe in antient days, as there have done ſince, ſome men of more genius than the common herd, and that were placed in ſituations and circumſtances, which gave them perhaps opportunities of receiving inſtruction from others, or at leaſt better means of obſerving nature themſelves, and more leiſure for the inveſtigation of truth, and for the improvement of knowledge. Theſe men were the firſt miſſionaries, and I ſuppoſe the beſt, that have been ſeen in the world. They aſſembled little families, clans or hords, into larger and more civilized communities: they invented many uſeful arts of life: they eſtabliſhed order and good government, and they taught men the great leſſon of promoting the happineſs of individuals, by promoting that of the public, and of preſerving liberty by ſubjection to law. Theſe legiſlators, however, had been bred in the ſuperſtitious opinions and practices of their families and countries, and for that reaſon one may incline to think, that they preſerved a tang of this ſuperſtition in their legiſlative capacity; ſince it is much more rare to ſee men ſhake off entirely long habits of error, than to ſee them riſe out of meer ignorance to certain degrees of knowledge. On this ſuppoſition, it would be obvious to account for the ſuperſtitious opinions and practices which they propagated, and rendered venerable in all the governments they eſtabliſhed. But a reflection preſents itſelf immediately, which lets us into a ſecret, and perhaps a truer motive that they had to hold this conduct. They might be neither bigots to old ſuperſtitions,

nor to thoſe that they ſuperinduced themſelves. They could not believe that they had a correſpondence, which they knew they had not, with gods or daemons, even if they believed the exiſtence of ſuch imaginary beings, and yet they all pretended to this great prerogative. The Egyptian wiſdom, their religious and civil inſtitutions, were taught by MERCURY: and their firſt legiſlators and philoſophers aſſumed the name, or had it given them on this account. ZOROASTER and ZAMOLXIS, one among the Bactrians, and the other among the Scythians, had revelations from VESTA. MINOS had them from JUPITER himſelf, and CHARONDAS from SATURN. NUMA converſed familiarly with ÆGERIA, and PYTHAGORAS with MINERVA. I need mention no more, for I will not offend by adding MOSES to this catalogue.

NOW ſince theſe men impoſed revelations they knew to be falſe, we may conclude, they were not much in earneſt about ſeveral of the doctrines they taught, and of the inſtitutions they made, not even about a doctrine which moſt, and I believe all of them, were extremely ſolicitous to inculcate, I mean the doctrine of future rewards and puniſhments. They endeavoured to profit of the general diſpoſition, to apprehend ſuperior powers, in ſome of whom ſuperſtition had accuſtomed men to imagine a ſeverity of juſtice, and even an inclination to afflict and torment; and they knew enough of the human heart, to know that men would be flattered with immortality in any ſhape, and tho the conſequence of it might be their own damnation. Religion in the hands of theſe philoſophical legiſlators, who ſucceeded to the authority of fathers of families, was a proper expedient to enforce obedience to political regimen: and neither the doctrines of it, nor the rites and ceremonies and manners of worſhip, could be too groſs for thoſe who had believed and practiſed many other ſuperſtitions

in

in the days of ſtill greater ſimplicity and ignorance, and whilſt they were under paternal government. I can eaſily perſuade myſelf, for I think it not only poſſible but probable, that many of the reformers had diſcovered the exiſtence of one Supreme Being, which cannot long eſcape the knowledge of thoſe who obſerve the whole face of nature. But this knowledge, and the conſequences they ſhould be able to deduce from it, might not ſeem to them ſufficiently adapted to the character of the people with whom they had to do: a people led by their ſenſes, and by the firſt appearances of things, with little uſe of reaſon, and little exerciſe of reflection, which might have rendered them capable of riſing from ſenſible to intelligible objects.

NATURAL theology, pure and unmixed, it might be thought, would ſpeak in vain to a multitude, in whom appetites and prepoſſeſſions, affections and paſſions, raiſed by ſenſible objects, were ſtrong, and the force of reaſon ſmall. It was neceſſary, therefore, in the opinion of theſe miſſionaries of good policy and good manners, and, in order to promote them both, of religion likewiſe, to ſuit their doctrines to ſuch groſs conceptions, and to raiſe ſuch affections and paſſions by human images, and by objects that made ſtrong impreſſions on ſenſe, as might be oppoſed with ſucceſs to ſuch as were raiſed by human images, and by ſenſible objects too, and were deſtructive of order, and pernicious to ſociety. That true ſelf-love and ſocial are the ſame, as you have expreſſed a maxim, I have always thought moſt undeniably evident; or that the author of nature has ſo conſtituted the human ſyſtem, that they coincide in it, may be eaſily demonſtrated to any one who is able to compare a very few clear and determinate ideas. But it will not follow, that he to whom this demonſtration is made, nor even he who makes it, ſhall regulate his conduct according to

it, nor reduce to practice what is true in ſpeculation. We are ſo made, that a leſs immediate good will determine the generality of mankind, in oppoſition to one that is much greater, even according to our own meaſure of things, but more remote: and an agreeable momentary ſenſation will be preferred to any laſting and real advantage which reaſon alone can hold out to us, and reflection alone can make us perceive. Philoſophy may teach us to do voluntarily, as I have read that ARISTOTLE ſays it does, what others are conſtrained to do by force. But the many were not philoſophers: and therefore the few might think very plauſibly, that fear was neceſſary to make them act as ſuch. The influence of reaſon is ſlow and calm, that of the paſſions ſudden and violent. Reaſon therefore might ſuggeſt the art that ſerved to turn the paſſions on her ſide.

THO I think, that they who inſtituted religions in the Pagan world were not convinced of the truth of their own doctrines, and that their ſole view was to add, by this political expedient, divine to human authority, and the ſanction of revelation to the dictates of right reaſon, yet am I perſuaded, that many of them believed the exiſtence of one Supreme Being, the fountain of all exiſtence, as I ſaid juſt now. They believed farther, the anecdotes of antiquity make it plain that they did, the exiſtence of many inferior beings generated, not ungenerated gods and daemons. They erected, as it were, a divine monarchy on the ruins of a divine ariſtocracy; and in this reſpect, as well as many others, they refined, whilſt they improved in knowledge, out of the abſurdities of original ſuperſtition, into one that was a little leſs abſurd, and that came nearer truth, or diſguiſed error under more plauſible appearances. But all theſe refinements, at leaſt as ſoon as the diſtinction of a public and a ſecret doctrine was made, whenever that was made,

made, became parts of their hidden doctrine, which was communicated to the initiated alone. Their outward doctrine differed not from that of the vulgar, it was the ſame : or rather the ſuperſtition they found eſtabliſhed by cuſtom and habit, and that which they ſuperinduced by inſtitution, compoſed one monſtrous ſyſtem of ridiculous polytheiſm and nauſeous idolatry. I imagine, that the firſt philoſophy, of which I am to ſpeak principally in this eſſay, took its riſe among the ſons of men, and was ſometimes purged and improved, as every other part of philoſophy was in certain places, and rendered more abominable in others.

I DO not intend to make the apology of thoſe, who deſtroyed the true principles of natural theology, by adopting old, and inventing new ſuperſtitions, in order to enforce ſubmiſſion to government, and the practice of morality. I ſay only, the firſt reformers of mankind are not without excuſe on this head. Great authorities may be cited, antient and modern, Pagan and Chriſtian ; ſome for impoſing things untrue, ſome for concealing things true, and ſome for doing both, in matters of religion. But a much better excuſe, and ſuch a one as divines particularly will have no good grace in rejecting, may be urged in their favor ; and if nothing can juſtify, this will at leaſt alleviate, their guilt.

THIS was their caſe : they found mankind immerſed in ſuperſtition, and accuſtomed to licentiouſneſs. To cure them of the latter, they made their profit of the former. They reduced curious ſuperſtitions that were taken up by chance, as every man's imagination ſuggeſted them to him, and without deſign, into ſyſtems ; and they directed theſe ſyſtems in doctrine and practice, to the purpoſe of reforming the manners of the half-ſavage people whom they civilized, and

to

to the improvement of ſocial life under the influence of law. Appeals to the reaſon of unreaſonable men would have had little effect: and they had no power to force inward conviction, any more than outward profeſſion. They employed therefore the only expedient, as bad a one as it was, that they had, ſufficient to force both; the dread of ſuperior power, maintained and cultivated by ſuperſtition, and applied by policy.

What now was the caſe of the famous legiſlator Moses? Some excuſe for the former will reſult, I think, from this compariſon. When God remembered his covenant with Abraham, an abſurd expreſſion, but very theological, the deſcendants of Abraham had forgot their God. They were become Egyptians, that is, they were attached to the country, and ſtill more attached to all the ſuperſtitions of it. They were conſtrained by miracles to abandon one; but no miracles, no interpoſitions of providence could oblige them to abandon the other. God was forced, therefore, to indulge them in ſeveral ſuperſtitious prejudices, as learned divines ſcruple not to affirm; and in fact it appears, that a great part of the ritual obſervances and laws of the Egyptians and of the Iſraelites were the ſame, or ſo near alike, as to leave no doubt of their having one common origin. This even Herman Witzius cannot deny. He allows that there was a great and wonderful conformity between them, "magnam atque mirandam convenientiam in religionis "negotio:" and therefore he would perſuade, if he could, againſt the plaineſt evidence that antiquity can furniſh on any ſubject, that the Egyptians borrowed theſe inſtitutions from the Iſraelites, the maſters from their ſcholars and their ſlaves; which would not mend the matter neither extremely, if it could be ſhewn, as he attempted very weakly to ſhew it, againſt Marsham and Spencer.

But

But you will aſk, and a reaſonable queſtion it will be, why was God forced to indulge his people in theſe ſuperſtitions? The divine has his anſwer ready; becauſe it becomes Infinite Wiſdom to do nothing by extraordinary and ſupernatural means, which may be done by ordinary and natural; and becauſe wiſe governors compound, as it were, often with obſtinacy, and indulge men in ſome prejudices, that they may draw them off the more effectually from others *. For theſe weighty

* Thus it is divines account for the many Egyptian rites that were preſerved in the Moſaical inſtitution, by aſſuming that God ordered it ſo out of indulgence to his choſen people, who were ſtrongly attached to the religion and manners of Egypt, and in order to reconcile them to his law, by a little mixture of ſuperſtition in the ceremonious part of it. Let another aſſumption, made on the ſame principle, and more preſumptuous, if that be poſſible, than the former, be mentioned. It is this. That ſincere, pious and learned man Mr. Whiston ſuppoſes, in his new theory of the earth, that the ſun, moon and ſtars were made before the ſix days work of the creation began; tho they are ſaid to have been made at the ſame time, according to the obvious ſenſe of the words of Moses. They are ſaid then firſt to be, or to be made, only becauſe they became firſt conſpicuous then, and their bodies diſtinctly viſible, as in a clear day or night they now appear to us, according to Mr. Whiston. The point is delicate, and therefore the good man thought himſelf obliged to account, as well as he could, for this apparent, and I fear real, difference between Moses and him. He ſays, in the firſt place, that Moses wrote in this manner, becauſe it was neceſſary to ſecure the Jews from the adoration of the hoſt of heaven. There was no other way to apply a fitting remedy to that prevailing cuſtom. The worſhip of terreſtrial things was demonſtrated, by this account of their original, to be fooliſh and abſurd; but that of the celeſtial bodies would have ſeemed permitted at leaſt, if they too had not been included in the ſame relation. He ſays, in the next place, that we ought to look on the Moſaic hiſtory of the creation, as on a journal of the appearances of things, ſuch an one as an honeſt and obſerving ſpectator on the earth would have made and have believed true, tho it was not agreeable to the reality of things. Now to the firſt of theſe bold aſſumptions, there lies a moſt cruel objection, of which Mr. Whiston takes no notice. If Moses had told the Jews, that the celeſtial bodies were created beings, as well as our earth, tho created before, even long before it, they would have believed him as ſoon, and have been as effectually armed againſt idolatrous worſhip, by a true repreſentation, as they believed him, and were thus armed by an untrue one. Another objection indeed Mr. Whiston ſuppoſes might be made to him, and he anſwers it plauſibly enough; for tho there might be no ſpectator to obſerve and record what paſſed, yet if the nature of the hiſtory

weighty reaſons, the God of truth choſe to indulge error, and ſuited his inſtitutions to the taſte of the age, " ad ſaeculi " guſtum et uſum," ſays SPENCER. For theſe weighty reaſons, he would not enlighten the underſtandings, ſoften the hearts, nor determine the wills of his choſen people; tho he had hardened the heart of PHARAOH a little before againſt the ſtrongeſt manifeſtations of almighty power; which is, I preſume, as extraordinary and ſupernatural an operation as that of ſoftening the heart to yield to ſuch manifeſtations. We may carry this farther. God contented himſelf, according to theſe bold judges of the principles and views of his proceedings, to take ordinary and natural means in a caſe to which they were not adequate, as he muſt have known in his preſcience that they would not be, and as we know by the hiſtory of theſe people, that they were not; their whole hiſtory being a continued ſeries of difficult converſions from idolatry, and eaſy relapſes to it. By this compariſon it appears then already that

hiſtory required it, MOSES might very properly repreſent things as they would have appeared to any ſuch ſpectator who had been preſent. But Mr. WHISTON immediately deſtroys the force, ſuch as it is, of his own anſwer. " To ſpeak my " mind freely," ſays he, " I believe that the Meſſias was there actually preſent, that " he made the journal, that he delivered it after to MOSES on mount Sinai, and that " from thence it appears in the front of his pentateuch at this day." It is no longer MOSES then who repreſents things untruly, but ſuch as they would have appeared to an honeſt ignorant ſpectator. It is the Meſſias who repreſents them untruly to MOSES, and deceives others deliberately, for he could not be deceived himſelf, to prevent by this fallacy an evil, that would have been prevented juſt as well by the truth. Whatever rank Mr. WHISTON is pleaſed to allow the Meſſias, he ſhould have reſpected this divine perſon enough, not to impute to him a falſe journal, made for an unneceſſary purpoſe. But this he does: whilſt other divines impute to the Supreme Being, an indulgence to the ſuperſtitious prejudices and habits of the Iſraelites, tho reaſon as well as experience ſhews, that theſe means, which they aſſume that infinite wiſdom employed, were in no ſort proportionable to the end which they aſſume that the ſame wiſdom propoſed. Theſe are the prophane effects of theological preſumption. I would ſooner be reputed, nay I would ſooner be, a Pagan than a Chriſtian, or an Atheiſt than a Theiſt; if to be one or the other it was neceſſary to believe ſuch abſurdities as theſe, which however diſguiſed, and ſoftened by a certain cant of expreſſion, are directly prophane, and indirectly, or by conſequence at leaſt, blaſphemous.

MOSES,

Moses, who pretended to be directed and authorized by God himſelf, indulged the Iſraelites in many favorite ſuperſtitions: as prophane legiſlators indulged the people, with whom they had to do.

But ſince I am got thus far into this ſubject, allow me to take a ſtep or two more, and to raiſe from the dead one of thoſe antient ſages, who gave laws to heathen nations, and inſtituted religions among them. Let me ſuppoſe, that one of our learned divines ſummed up the accuſation againſt him and his brethren, and contradiſtinguiſhed them from the legiſlator of the Hebrew people, thus. Notwithſtanding the conformity between ſome ritual laws and obſervances of this people, and of the Egyptians, and the frequent apoſtacies of the former, the knowledge of the one true God was preſerved among them by the Moſaic diſpenſation, whilſt polytheiſm and idolatry overſpread the reſt of the world. Thus the great deſign of God was effected; and thus the whole oeconomy of divine providence is juſtified. Would the antient ſage be left without any reply? I think not.

He might inſiſt, in his own excuſe, that Moses, like prophane lawgivers *, did not only indulge the people in ſome favorite habitual ſuperſtitions, but in others of his own inſtitution; and that his predilection for all theſe, over the real duties of natural religion, made him inflict more ſevere penalties on thoſe who violated the former, than on thoſe who violated the latter. He might inſiſt, that among the ſuperſtitions of Moſaic inſtitution there was one, which could be charged

* Proclive eſt obſervare, Deum cuilibet legi rituali, manu elatâ, hoc eſt protervè et ex praemeditato violatae, ſupplicium extremum ſtatuiſſe; quum tamen peccatis ſuâ naturâ gravioribus, fornicationi, furto, proximi mutilationi, et ejuſmodi, poenas longe mitiores irrogavit. Spen. l. 1. c. 1.

neither on the Egyptian, nor any other heathen nation, and which ſurpaſſed the moſt extravagant of theirs. Beſides the gods, which may be ſaid to have been, as it were, in common, a local tutelary divinity was aſſumed by every city or nation, and was diſtinguiſhed and appropriated by a particular appellation. This ſuperſtition, he would aſſert, that MOSES imitated, and abuſed, and aggravated by his imitation. Tho polytheiſm and idolatry overſpread the world, might he ſay, the exiſtence of the Monad, or the unity of the one Supreme Being, was not unknown to many of us. We could not teach this doctrine with ſucceſs to the vulgar, uncapable of conceiving things purely intellectual, but we taught it to thoſe who were initiated into our myſteries: and if we did not propoſe the true God as an object of public and popular adoration, neither did we bring the notions of him down to the low and groſs conceptions of the multitude, nor expoſe the majeſty of this awful Being to their prophanations. This MOSES did. He would not conſent to take upon him the commiſſion he was appointed to execute, nor go to the children of Iſrael, till he was able to tell them the name of the God who ſent him. In compliance with his importunity, and with the prejudices of the people, to whom he was ſent, God is ſaid to have given himſelf a name, a very magnificent one indeed, and ſuch an one as might denote the Supreme Being; but ſtill a name, by which he was to be diſtinguiſhed as the tutelary God of ABRAHAM, ISAAC and JACOB, of one family firſt, and then of one nation particularly, and almoſt excluſively of all others.

OUR antient ſage might add, that the leaſt part of the miracles wrought among the Iſraelites, with ſo much profuſion, and in a continued ſeries of divine interpoſitions, would have been more than ſufficient to draw any other nation, nay all the nations of the earth, from polytheiſm and idolatry. That in this

this caſe, neither he nor any other legiſlator would have found it difficult, by propagating the belief and worſhip of the true God, to civilize ſavage people without having recourſe to the expedient they employed. That as they were in a caſe very different, they deſerve excuſe and pity rather than blame, for promoting natural religion and good government at the expence of true theology. But that MOSES deſerves neither excuſe nor pity, ſince he choſe to make uſe of ſuperſtitions which he did not want, nay which defeated, inſtead of ſecuring, his intent; if his intent was to deſtroy idolatry by the means of them: for the ſage would inſiſt, with great appearance of reaſon, firſt, that the true God was made known to the Iſraelites by ſuch manifeſtations of himſelf to them, and that his law was promulgated in ſo ſolemn and awful a manner, if there is any truth in the Jewiſh traditions, as to leave no pretence for adding any thing to confirm the knowledge or to enforce the law. He would inſiſt in the next place, that if the apoſtacies of the Iſraelites, after ſuch manifeſtations and declarations of the one true God, can be any way accounted for, it muſt be by the effect of the very expedient which our divines pretend, that infinite wiſdom employed to prevent theſe apoſtacies. He would conclude in ſhort, that MOSES and the heathen legiſlators employed the ſame means, with this difference, that theſe means were better proportioned to their end than to his; ſince they deſigned to govern mankind by ſuperſtition; and he meaned, or as divines preſume to tell us, God meaned, to deſtroy idolatry by indulgence to the very ſuperſtitions out of which it grew. Upon the whole matter, whether the firſt ſages are entirely excuſable or not, their proceeding was much more reaſonable than that which was followed by the order, and under the immediate direction of God himſelf, as theſe Eunomians, who affect to underſtand the whole ſecret of the divine

ceconomy, and to know God as well as he knows himſelf, have the boldneſs to aſſert.

THO I have ſaid thus much, in excuſe for thoſe who were the firſt to eſtabliſh religion and government, I ſhall not attempt any excuſe for thoſe who ſucceeded them, and who cultivated error and ſuperſtition on a principle of private ambition. This might be the caſe ſometimes, and to ſome degree among the moſt ſavage people in antient days, as we ſee that it is in our own age among the wild nations of America and Africa, who have their conjurers and their diviners, and who practiſe certain fooliſh rites under their direction. It was more ſo, no doubt, when little ſtates began to be formed by aſſemblages of a few roving families, that fixed themſelves in ſocieties under the conduct of ſome leader of their own or of ſome foreign legiſlator; the memory of which events has been preſerved in the fabulous traditions that are come down to us concerning ORPHEUS and others; for a certain concurrence of fabulous traditions may hold out with ſufficient evidence ſome general truths. But we have, if I miſtake not, in the ſtory of PYTHAGORAS, an example of error and ſuperſtition, propagated on a motive of private ambition, that is more circumſtantial and better vouched.

PYTHAGORAS came into Italy, with great advantages for effecting his purpoſes. He came among Greeks, divided into many little ſtates, under very unſettled governments. He came with great reputation of learning and wiſdom and ſanctity, from a nation renowned for its antiquity, for civil policy and for divine myſtery; from a nation from whom the firſt rudiments of civility and even the uſe of letters had been imported into Greece, the mother country of all theſe little ſtates.

ſtates. He had a figure; for even that has been thought worthy of mention, to inſpire reſpect to thoſe who were to be taken by the eye. He had eloquence, to lead thoſe who were to be led by the ear: and his miracles, for miracles are eaſily impoſed on people ignorant or ſuperſtitious, and the people PYTHAGORAS had to do with were both, made him eaſily paſs for the Pythian or Hyperborean APOLLO, for one of the genii that were ſuppoſed to inhabit the moon, or for a celeſtial divinity.

HE opened his ſchool and began his miſſion at Crotona, where his orations to the old men, to the young men, to the women and to the children, and much more the miracle of fiſh which JAMBLICUS relates ſo circumſtantially, gained him admittance and eſtabliſhed his credit. As his firſt ſchool or college, ſo his firſt church, was founded here. I may call it by that name, after CLEMENT of Alexandria, and may obſerve, after that father likewiſe, a conformity between the Pythagorean and Chriſtian inſtitutions in this reſpect. Perſons of all ages and ſexes, who were converted by the miracles and ſermons of PYTHAGORAS, reſorted to this church. They were inſtructed in the public doctrines of his religion, and in thoſe divine truths, which they were to believe firſt in hopes of underſtanding them afterwards; which is the very method that St. AUSTIN in ſome part of his works preſcribes to Chriſtian converts. Some few, and ſuch alone as he judged proper after a long and ſevere probation, like that he had gone through himſelf in Egypt, and from which neither the recommendations of POLYCRATES, nor the favor of AMASIS could exempt him, were admitted into his college, that became a ſeminary of enthuſiaſts. They lived there like Cenobites, members of this ſpiritual family, renouncing their own, and throwing their whole ſubſtance into the common ſtock. Their long,

21[illegible]6

long ſilence, their abſtinence, their ſelf-denial, their purifications, their auſterities, and the torments to which they ſubmitted, prepared them for any trials, to which they could be poſſibly expoſed in the propagation of their maſter's ſpiritual empire.

In ſuch an age, and with ſuch miniſters as theſe, men devoted to him, and ready to be martyrs for him, he could not have failed to ſucceed among a people who were already prepared, by the errors and ſuperſtitions of their former inſtitutions, for any that the ſcheme of his ambition could render it neceſſary to impoſe. But he and his diſciples ſhewed this ſcheme too groſsly and too ſoon: for notwithſtanding all the fine things that are ſaid of this famous perſon by Porphyry, Jamblicus, and other writers, and notwithſtanding all the obſcurity and imperfection of traditions concerning theſe Grecian colonies, it ſeems apparent enough that the accuſations of Cylo and Nino were not void of truth, nor the jealouſy that prevailed groundleſs. Pythagoras cauſed revolutions in ſeveral cities, in Crotona, in Sybaris, in Catana for inſtance, and his diſciples, ſuch as Zaleucus and Charondas, if in truth they were his diſciples, aſſumed wherever they came the part of legiſlators, whether called to it or not; as if it had been a right belonging to this religious ſociety to give laws not only to their own, but to the civil ſociety that admitted them likewiſe. Such too we may believe they pretended it was, ſince they all pretended to be divinely inſpired: and divine inſpiration, as well as divine inſtitution, implies an authority far ſuperior to any that is merely human. Diogenes Laertius hints that the Crotonians killed him for fear of being reduced under tyranny by him: and ſome traditions ſay, that commanding the army of the Agrigentines againſt the Syracuſians he was beat, and killed in the purſuit.

In

In all caſes, the declaration he was reported to have made, that he had rather be a bull for one day than an ox always, was underſtood; and the bull periſhed. Almoſt all his diſciples periſhed with him: and the expulſion of this ſect out of Italy, may be properly enough compared to that of chriſtianity out of Japan. The effect was not ſo entire in the former as in the latter inſtance; ſince the philoſophy of Pythagoras continued to be taught in Italy by Aristaeus and others, who took warning and affected government no longer; but who thought too, or pretended to think, that the gods would be diſpleaſed if they ſuffered ſo divine an inſtitution to be extinguiſhed.

The ſame ſpirit, and the ſame apprehenſion, did not prevail in Egypt, and the great eaſtern kingdoms: for which reaſon I perſuade myſelf that their eccleſiaſtical and civil conſtitutions grew up together, and that people who ſubmitted to kingly, might ſubmit the more eaſily to prieſtly government; becauſe the prieſts who had uſed to lead them by ſuperſtition, had acted in concert with their kings to make theſe eſtabliſhments. Kings wanted their influence over the people; the people wanted their influence over kings: and kings and people were both ſilly enough to imagine that they wanted ſuch a protection from the gods, and ſuch an intercourſe with heaven as theſe prophets and ſeers, and magicians and prieſts, for we may jumble them all together, could alone procure.

SECT.

SECTION III*.

AS beneficial as theſe men had been whilſt they ſtood diſtinguiſhed by knowledge and wiſdom, or by pretenſions to them, not by rank, as individuals not as members of a particular order, they became hurtful in many reſpects when they compoſed a community within a community, had a ſeparate intereſt, and by conſequence a ſeparate policy. I

* I HAVE ſometimes thought, and ſaid perhaps in our converſations, that the life of mankind may be compared aptly enough to that of every individual, in reſpect to the acquiſition of ſcience. There is in both a ſtate of infancy, of adoleſcence, of manhood, and of dotage, to be obſerved. The ideas of infancy are taken ſuperficially from the firſt appearances of things to the ſenſes. They are ill compared, ill aſſociated, and compounded into notions for the moſt part either trifling or abſurd. In adoleſcence, ideas increaſe and grow a little better determined. Experience and obſervation compare and compound them better. In manhood, the judgment is ripened, the underſtanding formed, the errors of former ſtates are aſſumed to be corrected, and the farther progreſs of ſcience to be more ſure. Thus it ſhould be no doubt. But affections and paſſions multiply, and gather ſtrength, in the whole courſe of this progreſs. What is gained one way is loſt another: and if real knowledge increaſes, real error mixes and increaſes with it. Fancy may not impoſe, as it did perhaps, but it may incline ſtrongly to error: and authority and cuſtom will do the reſt. They will invert the whole order of ſcience. Ignorant ages and ignorant nations will impoſe on the moſt knowing: and even in the ſame age and nation, infancy impoſes on adoleſcence, and adoleſcence on manhood, till the great round is finiſhed, and the philoſopher who began a child ends a child.

LET this be applied principally to knowledge in the firſt philoſophy. Arts of all kinds, and many other ſciences, have been improved not ſo much by building on old, as by laying new foundations; not ſo much by aſſuming implicitly principles either antient or modern, as by examining all, and adopting, or rejecting, or inventing without any regard to authority. The very reverſe of this proceeding has been practiſed in matters of the firſt philoſophy: and the profeſſors of it at this hour, in the mature age of philoſophy, do little more very often than repeat the bablings of it's infancy, and the ſallies of it's youth. Theſe men are more properly antient philoſophers than thoſe whom they call ſo. They live indeed in the mature age of philoſophy. But in this age, whenever metaphyſics and theology are concerned, they ſeem to ruſh forward into a ſtate of dotage, and affect to hold the language that the firſt philoſophy held in Oriental, Egyptian, and Grecian ſchools, before ſhe had learned to ſpeak plain.

pretend

pretend not to conſider how their power encroached on that of the ſtate, and became independent on it, nor how their wealth increaſed to the impoveriſhment of all other orders. We may gueſs at the antient by what we know of the modern clergy, and may be allowed to wonder that in thoſe days, as well as in our own, it has been found ſo hard to diſcover that, tho civil government cannot ſubſiſt ſo well without religion, religion may ſubſiſt and floriſh too without eccleſiaſtical government. It will be enough for my purpoſe to obſerve, to what a degree of wealth and power this order aroſe in the nations we ſpeak of, and to ſhew how it propagated error in philoſophy, and ſuperſtition in religion.

As to the firſt then, the reverend Magi in Perſia had the province of teaching princes how to govern, and of aſſiſting their pupils in government afterwards. It was much the ſame in Egypt, where the prieſts had a peculiar right to admoniſh and to reprove, indirectly at leaſt, the kings. In Ethiopia, this prerogative was carried farther: for there the kings were ordered to die whenever the prieſts thought fit, till a ſacrilegious king, ERGAMENES, I think, aroſe, broke into the ſacred college, and put theſe ghoſtly tyrants themſelves to death. This did not happen neither till the bloody inquiſition had been long in poſſeſſion of this power, if ERGAMENES lived about the time of the ſecond PTOLEMY. The wealth and the immunities of this order were as exorbitant as the authority and power. We may learn from DIODORUS the Sicilian, not only that this order had raiſed itſelf to a partnerſhip in the ſovereignty, but to an exemption from all impoſitions and burdens; for the members of it were "participes imperii---cunctis oneribus "immunes," and they had alſo one third of the whole property of Egypt. As to their immunities, there is an aſtoniſhing inſtance in the book of Geneſis. The miſerable people

were obliged in a great famine to ſell their lands to the king for bread. But the king gave bread to the prieſts: they eat their fill, and kept their lands.

To ſpeak now of the manner in which, and the reaſons for which, this order of men propagated error in philoſophy, and ſuperſtition in religion, let it be conſidered, how neceſſary it was for them to maintain that reputation of ſanctity, knowledge, and wiſdom, on which this eſteem and reverence had been founded. They had provided themſelves many ſupports, in the form and conſtitution of the Egyptian and other governments; but they ſaw at the ſame time, like able men, how neceſſary it was to continue in force and vigor, the original principles of the empire they had over the minds of men, on which all the reſt depended. The general ſcheme of their policy therefore ſeems to have been this. They built their whole ſyſtem of philoſophy on the ſuperſtitious opinions and practices that had prevailed in days of the greateſt ignorance: and, by conſequence, their principal object was falſe, not real ſcience. Real ſcience would have diſcovered their fallacies in a multitude of inſtances: and it would have ſerved their chief purpoſe effectually in none, if they had left it unſophiſticated. Beſides, men began to riſe, as TULLY expreſſes himſelf, "à "neceſſariis ad elegantiora." They might therefore have been overtaken by ſome who were not of their order in real, or have been detected in fantaſtical ſcience. It was fit therefore, that they ſhould guard againſt both theſe accidents: and they did ſo with much cunning. They multiplied and exaggerated their pretenſions to ſuch kinds of knowledge, as every man was conſcious to himſelf that he could not acquire; and yet as every man was prepared to believe, according to the prejudices of the age, that they had acquired by traditions, derived from antient ſages, or even by divine illuminations, and a correſpondence

reſpondence ſeveral ways carried on with gods and daemons. But ſtill they did not reſt their ſecurity even on this alone. They had other expedients, and they employed them artfully and ſucceſsfully. Moſt of their doctrines were wrapped up in the myſterious veil of allegory. Moſt of them were propagated in the myſterious cypher of ſacred dialects, of ſacerdotal letters, and of hieroglyphical characters: and the uſeful diſtinction of an outward and inward doctrine was invented, one for the vulgar, and one for the initiated; that is, one for thoſe to whom it was uſeleſs, or dangerous to truſt their ſecret, and one for thoſe the ability, credulity, or enthuſiaſm of whom they had ſufficiently tried by a long noviciate. Among the firſt, allegory paſſed for a literal relation of facts, and hyperbole was the common ſtile. Among the laſt, all was fraud or folly. We ſee enough of the firſt in the Old Teſtament to make both probable. Much in this manner, I think, that the corruption of the firſt philoſophy was eſtabliſhed in Egypt and the eaſt, from whence it ſpread to diſtant countries and diſtant ages, after it became a trade in the hands of men, in whom the characters of philoſophers and prieſts were confounded.

It would be tedious and uſeleſs to deſcend into many particulars concerning the various ſyſtems of polytheiſm and idolatry. Let us content ourſelves with making ſome few obſervations that may point out the propagation of error in natural theology, as it deſcended from the Egyptians and other nations to the Greeks. To be particular about the riſe of it would be ridiculous affectation. It aroſe long before the men, who appear to us to have been the firſt teachers of it, exiſted. Pherecydes of Syros, who writ in proſe, and philoſophized out of verſe and ſong the firſt among the Greeks, was the maſter of Pythagoras and Thales, who founded the Italic

and Ionic ſects, and lived therefore later than the fiftieth olympiad. HOMER and HESIOD lived indeed before the inſtitution of the olympiads, and perhaps much about the ſame time; tho TULLY, or CATO *, places your blind man long before the other.

BUT I am far from thinking, that HOMER meant his Iliad and Odyſſey ſhould paſs for philoſophical poems; tho it has been the madneſs of pedants almoſt from his own age to ours, to extol him and cenſure him as a philoſopher. He meant to flatter his countrymen, by recording the feats of their anceſtors, the valor of ſome, and the prudence of others; and he employed for the machinery of his poem the theology of his age, as TASSO and MILTON have employed that of theirs. Had ARNOBIUS, and much more ſuch a weak philoſopher as JUSTIN, or ſuch a warm rhetor as TERTULLIAN, lived in our days, you would have been attacked in your turn, and have been made the father of roſycruſianiſm, and of all the ſilly doctrines about ſylphs and gnomes; juſt as reaſonably as HOMER has been attacked, by the zeal of Chriſtian writers, for teaching polytheiſm and idolatry. I believe too, that you would have been as well defended by your commentator, by his interpretations of your allegories, and by his explanations of the hidden ſenſe of the Rape of the Locke, for inſtance, as HOMER was by thoſe who found out an hidden ſenſe in all his fables, and who judged that he muſt have been very knowing in natural philoſophy, becauſe he mentions ſun, wind, rain, and thunder for which you laugh at POLITIAN and others of his learned admirers †.

THEY who have repreſented HOMER as a great philoſopher, have made themſelves ridiculous. They who have re-

* Cic. de Senect. † Pref. to the Iliad.

preſented

preſented him as the great author of polytheiſm, idolatry, and ſuperſtition, have done him wrong. Many antient bards floriſhed long before him. Who they were, whether the name of ORPHEUS, for inſtance, was given to different perſons, like that of PHARO, and that of ZOROASTER very probably; whether it was derived from a Phoenician or Arabian word that ſignified knowledge, as VOSSIUS thought; whether no ſuch man as ORPHEUS ever exiſted, as ARISTOTLE thought; or whether the verſes aſcribed to him were writ by a certain Cecrops *, as the Pythagoricians pretended, it matters little. We may reaſon in this caſe much as TULLY does about ATLAS, PROMETHEUS, and CEPHEUS †; and we may conclude that the fabulous anecdotes, with which old traditions were crowded about ORPHEUS, to mention the moſt famous only, and the doctrines he taught, and the myſteries he inſtituted, prove at leaſt thus much, that Egyptian theology, and many of thoſe ſuperſtitions had been imported into Greece long before HOMER lived. We may eaſily figure to ourſelves, with what advantage this theology and theſe ſuperſtitions were introduced among the rude, illiterate, and at that time half-ſavage Greeks, from a nation as famous as the Egyptian, and by men whether Egyptians, Phoenicians, or Greeks who had been the ſcholars of prieſts, prophets, ſeers, and magicians; of holy men who ſaw viſions, and dreamed dreams, and enjoyed every ſort of divine communication in a country, where dynaſties of gods had ruled ſo long. PLATO had the front, in a much more enlightened ſtate of Greece, to publiſh his own whimſies or thoſe of PYTHAGORAS, in his Timaeus, on the faith of men begotten by gods, and therefore well acquainted with their fathers. Might not theſe miſſionary poets, or their maſters, paſs for ſuch ſons of the gods in the dark ages we refer to?

* De Nat. Deor. l. 1. † Tuſcul. Quaeſ. l. 5.

Or

Or might not that divine fury, the ſure mark of inſpiration, be aſcribed to them, which was believed to ſeize the ſibyls, and which ſeized the prophets and ſons of the prophets among the Jews, nay even thoſe who happened to fall in their way, as we learn from the bible, that it ſeized not only SAUL, but even the men he had ſent to take DAVID.

WE may believe that HOMER's predeceſſors went about ſinging their ſpiritual and moral canticles, philoſophical rhapſodies, and heroical ballads, as tradition reports that he did after them. What became of their hymns or canticles we know not, whether any were preſerved, or when they were loſt. But loſt they were, which the ſcattered fragments of his works had been likewiſe, if they had not fallen by accident into the hands of LYCURGUS, as PLUTARCH, whom you cite for this fact, relates; and if SOLON had not perfected the compilation of them, as DIOGENES LAERTIUS relates, whom I wiſh you had cited likewiſe, to ſhew that the two greateſt legiſlators of Greece publiſhed the two firſt editions of HOMER. In this manner his writings became the ſole repertory to later ages of all the theology, philoſophy, and hiſtory of thoſe which preceded his. All the ſcriblers of Greece imitated, and pillaged them, and none more than PLATO.

SOLON had ſtudied philoſophy in Egypt under the two moſt celebrated prieſts of Heliopolis and Sais, and had learned even the Atlantic language, according to the report of PLATO. This conſideration might influence the legiſlator ſtrongly, in favor of a poet who had been ſkilled in the political, mythological, and every other part of Egyptian knowledge, above three centuries before he went to that ſchool for inſtruction. But the general reputation of Egyptian wiſdom, the beauty of thoſe poems wherein they found, or imagined that they found

found ſo much of it interſperſed, and the loſs perhaps of what their firſt poetical reformers had committed to writing, if they writ any thing, might raiſe the eſteem for HOMER among all the Greek philoſophers, to that exorbitant and even ridiculous height, to which in fact it roſe. As ſoon as the rage of making complete ſyſtems of philoſophy, wherein theology and legiſlative knowledge had always a principal ſhare, began to be the prevailing mode in Greece, every ſyſtem-maker thought it neceſſary to be armed with the authority of HOMER: and they did for this purpoſe, the ſame thing by his writings, that St. JEROM ſays ſomewhere or other was done by the ſacred writings, every one endeavoured to drag them to his ſenſe, even when they were contrary to it. "Scripturas tra- "here repugnantes."

THE poems of HOMER, and the whole Pagan theology, like embroidered or painted curtains, coarſely wrought by ſuperſtition firſt, and afterwards enriched and heightened in their coloring by the imaginations of poets, hid the true ſcene wherein the principles of natural theology are to be found from vulgar ſight, which they amuſed with gaudy and groteſque figures, out of the proportions and forms of nature, divine or human, inſtead of ſhewing this ſcene in that ſimplicity, in which it will appear to every ſober eye. The true ſcene wherein the principles of natural theology are to be found, was ſignified perhaps in that remarkable inſcription on a temple at Sais, which PLUTARCH mentions, however differently that may have been interpreted. "I am all that has "been, is, and ſhall be, and my veil no mortal has ever yet re- "moved." This veil repreſented the works of God, in which and by which alone he is to be diſcovered, as far as he has thought fit to communicate any knowledge of himſelf. Beyond this veil the eye of human reaſon can diſcover nothing. By the help

help of theſe images, we may form a juſt and clear notion of the different ways by which men run into error, on this important ſubject: the generality, by neglecting to contemplate God in the works of God: philoſophers, by attempting to remove the veil, to contemplate God in his nature and eſſence, not in his works alone. The vulgar perſonified, deified, and worſhipped the works, without looking up to the worker, as their poets had taught them: the generation of the viſible world was to them a generation of inviſible gods, for they had taken ideas of power and wiſdom, of good and evil, from the phaenomena; and they perſonified and deified not only theſe, but affections, paſſions, and almoſt every complex mode that the human mind can frame. When they were in this profuſe mood of deification, we cannot wonder if they deified thoſe men from whom they had received great benefits, nor if tutelary heroes became tutelary gods. Some of the philoſophers, having been led by a more full and accurate contemplation of nature, to the knowledge of a ſupreme ſelf-exiſtent Being, of infinite power and wiſdom, and the firſt cauſe of all things, were not contented with this degree of knowledge. They would explain, they would even analyſe the divine nature. They made a ſyſtem of God's moral as well as phyſical attributes, by which to account for the proceedings of his providence; and reaſoning thus beyond all their ideas, by a certain agitation and ferment of the mind, they remained in the labyrinths of abſurdity they had formed; acknowledging the exiſtence of this Monad, this Unity, elevated above all eſſence and all intelligence, and yet neglecting to worſhip him; conforming to the practice of idolatry, tho not to the doctrines of polytheiſm.

But how true ſoever all this may be, and much more to the ſame effect that might be added, yet the great principle that

that maintained all the corruptions of natural religion, was that of prieſtcraft. Philoſophers and prieſts were the ſame perſons long, as I imagine that bards and philoſophers had been before: and when they aſſumed their diſtinct characters, the prieſts were too powerful, and the people too bigotted, to hope for any reformation. An oppoſition to the groſſeſt ſuperſtition, or a diſbelief of that rabble of the ſky, thoſe gods of different ranks and different employments, thoſe celeſtial huſbands and wives, fathers and children, brothers and ſiſters, would have paſſed for atheiſm; and the beſt of men would have been reputed atheiſts, and have been treated accordingly, as SOCRATES was. It was in theſe countries then, as it is in ſeveral countries now. Nothing was too abſurd for ſtupid credulity to receive, nor for artifice, emboldened by ſucceſs, to impoſe. Sham miracles were ſhewn like other falſe wares, in a proper light, and at a proper diſtance; and thoſe errors which had contracted the ruſt of antiquity became, for that reaſon alone, venerable. In ſhort, the whole ſcheme of religion was applied then, as it is in many countries, Chriſtian and others, ſtill, to the advantage of thoſe who had the conduct of it. The worſhip of one God, and the ſimplicity of natural religion, would not ſerve their turn. Gods were multiplied, that devotions and all the profitable rites and ceremonies which belong to them, might be ſo too. The inviſible MITHRAS would have been of little value, without the viſible, to the magi: and a calf or a cat, nay garlic and onions, were more lucrative divinities in lower Egypt, than KNEPH had ever been in the upper.

BUT farther: it was not the firſt philoſophy alone that was thus corrupted, but every other part of ſcience that could be wreſted and miſapplied to the ſame purpoſes. The prieſthood held it, in Egypt and in the other countries from whence the

Greeks derived their knowledge, to be a maxim of eccleſiaſtical policy, and a wiſe one it was, to keep every part of ſcience like a monopoly in their own hands, and to be of ſome real uſe to mankind, in that manner at leaſt. On this principle, they cultivated arithmetic and geometry. Arithmetic might be of uſe to them in order to calculate the number of their gods and daemons, or the revenues they enjoyed, which was no eaſy taſk: geometry might help them to ſet out the bounds of their poſſeſſions, and ſerve to other temporal purpoſes; for they had not yet diſcovered, as ſome modern writers have done, how well geometry may be applied to prove the immortality of the ſoul, and to the ſolution of other metaphyſical and theological problems. But they had ſtill more uſe for phyſic and aſtronomy, to both of which they applied themſelves with induſtry and ſucceſs, and both of which they made ſubſervient to their great deſign. "Medicina animi," phyſic for the ſoul, was the title of ſome books of MERCURY, that were carried in the famous proceſſion deſcribed by CLEMENT of Alexandria. It may be, that the principles and rules of theurgic magic were laid down in thoſe ſacred writings, and that the Egyptian prieſts pretended to raiſe themſelves and others, by the obſervation of theſe rules, to ſuch a communion with the gods, as to employ their divine power and knowledge whenever they were neceſſary. But the phyſic converſant about bodily ſubſtances only, produced another ſort of magic which may be called natural; ſince it conſiſted in this, that the effects of cauſes very natural were aſcribed by ignorant people, not indeed always and abſolutely, to a ſupernatural power, but always to a power and knowledge above thoſe of any other men than their magicians; and that a good chemiſt was deemed, like our friar BACON, a conjurer. Thus again aſtronomy, which had been cultivated long under the name of aſtrology, dwindled into that contemptible ſci-

ence

ence which is at this day ſo juſtly diſtinguiſhed from it. From conſidering the motions, men grew attentive to the ſuppoſed influences of the ſtars; and that ridiculous ſcene of fraud opened itſelf, which continues ſtill to impoſe in the eaſt, where aſtrologers, who cannot make an almanac, govern princes and nations, by pretending to read their deſtinies in the ſky.

The whole ſyſtem of mythology and Pagan theology was ſo abſurd, that it could not have been introduced into common belief, if it had not begun to be ſo, like other abſurd ſyſtems of religion, in times of the darkeſt ignorance, and among creatures as irrational as Groenlanders, Samojedes, or Hottentots; if after that, error and knowledge growing up together, the former had not outgrown the other, and maintained itſelf againſt the improvements of human reaſon and of knowledge, by the force of habit; and finally, if legiſlators had not thought it dangerous to cure, and uſeful to confirm ſuperſtition: and yet, after all, much art was neceſſary to keep it in repute, beſides the craft that has been already mentioned, as well as to make it anſwer the deſign of legiſlators.

Allegories that paſſed for facts, the fraud of oracles, the impertinence of parables that pretended to ſome meaning, and of fables that pointed at none, except it was to encourage vice by the example of their gods, compoſed an outward religion, ſupported a ridiculous worſhip, and ſerved to amuſe the vulgar; for in divine matters, the marvellous, the improbable, nay the impoſſible and the unintelligible, make the ſtrongeſt impreſſions on vulgar minds. It has been ſaid, that myſteries are deſigned to exerciſe our faith, and allegories our underſtanding; but nothing can be more fooliſhly ſaid. A myſtery, that is, a thing unknown, may exerciſe our underſtanding

juſt as well as our faith, and can in truth exerciſe neither. We may have faith in an authority we know, but it is faith in this authority, and not properly in the myſtery, which makes us acquieſce in it. An allegory may be contrived to puzzle and perplex the underſtanding, or to hold out nothing to us but itſelf. In the firſt caſe it is impertinent, in the ſecond it is fraudulent, and in both it perverts the ſole uſe it ſhould be employed for, in the didactic, or even in the poetical ſtile. Such allegories become, at beſt, and when they have really ſome meaning, a ſort of riddles: they are fit to exerciſe the ſagacity, and to be the intellectual amuſement of children alone, and yet they have been the pride of great genii. JOSEPHUS, who was a Jew and a cabaliſt, admired them much: and he tells a ſilly ſtory, on the authority of MENANDER of Epheſus, to give them credit, or to raiſe our ideas of the wiſdom of SOLOMON, HIRAM, and ABDEMON. The two firſt had, it ſeems, a curious correſpondence, in which they propoſed riddles to one another, and the Tyrian paid moſt of the forfeits, till ABDEMON taught him to poſe the wiſeſt of men. PLATO *, who diſgraced philoſophy as much as HOMER elevated poetry by the uſe of allegory, declared that this poet, whom he baniſhed in another mood out of his commonwealth, ſhould not be read by any who were not initiated in wiſdom; that is, who were not able to draw an hidden ſenſe out of his writings; that is, who were not able to make their own inventions paſs for the ſignification of his fables, and the interpretation of his allegories. Allegory, in the true intention of it, is deſigned to make clearer as well as ſtronger impreſſions on the mind; and, therefore, as they who pretend to foretel future events ſhould be ſuſpected of impoſture, when they deliver their predictions, like thoſe who governed the oracles of the heathen world, in obſcure and equivocal terms, that may be applied afterwards, as they often

* In ALCIB.

were,

were, to different and even contrary events; ſo they, who pretend to teach divine truths in allegorical, ſymbolical, or any myſterious language, deſerve to be ſuſpected of impoſture likewiſe. There may be good reaſons for concealing, there can never be any ſuch for diſguiſing, which is a degree of falſifying truth. If men reaſoned a little better than they do commonly, and were a little leſs blinded by prejudices, they would not be ſuch bubbles as to receive on one authority what comes to them really on another. The obſcure prophecy, and the abſtruſe doctrine, when one is interpreted, and the other explained, are not ſo properly the prophecy of the prophet, nor the doctrine of the doctor, as they are ſuch of the perſons who apply the prophecy to ſome particular event, and determine the doctrine to ſome particular ſenſe, neither of which was poſſibly intended by them.

RAPIN ſays, in his compariſon of PLATO and ARISTOTLE, that the ſymbolical theology of the Egyptians ſeemed to them the moſt reſpectful manner of treating divine ſubjects; and he quotes JAMBLICUS for this obſervation, that they thought themſelves obliged to imitate nature on theſe occaſions, who hides the perfections of the mind under the outward veil of the body. Now the firſt of theſe excuſes will appear ridiculous enough, if we refer it only to the opinions of men. But if we refer it to any divine revelation, it is ſtill more egregiouſly abſurd. The laſt is an allegorical excuſe for allegory, worthy of JAMBLICUS, and little worthy of a remark. But the jeſuit gives, in the ſame paragraph, the true and univerſal reaſon, ſo univerſal and ſo true, that I wonder at him for giving it, of all figurative theology. "The prieſts, he ſays, "who had the keeping of theſe myſteries, authorized this me-"thod to ſupport their credit, and to draw veneration to them-"ſelves by the reſpect for thoſe holy things which they hid "from

" from the eyes of the people, that they might not be pro-
" phaned."

I CANNOT let this ſubject go, without taking notice of what my lord BACON ſays upon it, in the preface to his treatiſe, which he calls " de ſapientiâ," and might have called more properly " de futilitate ſive de inſania veterum." In that, he makes parables and allegories ſo eſſential to religion, that he affirms, that to take them away is to forbid almoſt all commerce of things divine and human*. Whatever reaſons this great author had to make ſuch a declaration, it was raſhly made. The expreſſion is allegorical, but the meaning of it is obvious; and therefore I ſay, that as far as man is concerned in carrying this commerce on, we are juſtified in ſuſpecting it of enthuſiaſm or fraud; ſince allegory has been always a principal inſtrument of theological deception. The chancellor admits, that it ſerves to involve and conceal, " ad involucrum et velum," which is in direct contradiction to its proper uſe, for that is to enlighten and illuſtrate, " ad lumen et illuſtrationem." He choſe to ſay nothing of the former, rather than to be engaged in diſputes, " potius quam lites ſuſcipiamus," and we may add, rather than offend the clergy. For me, who think it much better not to write at all, than to write under any reſtraint from delivering the whole truth of things as it appears to me; who ſhould think ſo, if I was able to write and go to the bottom of every ſubject as well as he; and who have no cavils nor invectives to fear, when I confine the communication of my thoughts to you and a very few friends, as I do in writing theſe eſſays; I ſhall repeat what I have ſaid already, that the philoſopher or divine, who pretends to inſtruct others by allegorical expreſſions without an immediate, direct, and intelligible application of

* ——— cum ejuſmodi velis et umbris religio gaudeat, ut qui eas tollat, commercia divinorum et humanorum ferè interdicat.

the

the allegory to ſome propoſition or other, has nothing in his thoughts but the ſuppoſed allegory, and is mad enough to deceive himſelf, or knave enough to attempt to impoſe on thoſe he pretends to inſtruct. If he has any thing there which he diſtruſts, and dares not venture to expoſe naked and ſtripped of allegory to the undazzled eye of reaſon, it is too much even to inſinuate in ſuch a caſe, and eſpecially on ſubjects of the firſt philoſophy. We may compare ſuch theology as this to thoſe artificial beauties, who hide their defects under dreſs and paint: "pars minima eſt ipſa puella ſui."

If we ſuppoſe the Supreme Being concerned in this commerce, as it is called, we ſuppoſe what is very prophane and audacious. I apply my lord Bacon's words, "prophanum "quiddam ſonat et audax." Can any thing be more ſo, than a ſuppoſition that the God of truth communicates with men by a wretched human expedient, contrived by them to deceive one another, or to help their imperfect faculties in the conception of things, and in the expreſſion of their conceptions? Tully * entertained, in this very reſpect, much more worthy notions of the divine nature. He argues againſt the vanity of divination by dreams, in anſwer to his brother, on this principle. If they come from the gods, they are ſent for the ſake of man: and if they are ſent for the ſake of man, we ought to believe that all ſuch advertiſements muſt be intelligible to man †. Obſcure dreams therefore cannot be ſuch advertiſements. They would be repugnant to the majeſty of the gods §. When God ſpeaks to his creature, it will be always in terms plain and preciſe. "Hoc ne feceris. Hoc facito." Thou ſhalt have none other gods but me. Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as

* De Divin. l. 2.

† Intelligi à nobis dii velle debebant ea, quae noſtra nos monebant. Ibid.

§ Obſcura ſomnia minimè conſentanea ſunt majeſtati deorum. Ibid.

thyſelf.

thyſelf. The Stoics thought to evade this objection againſt divination by dreams, when they ſet up their ſage, that ideal being, for the ſole diviner *. But TULLY laughed at all theſe pretenſions to a ſupernatural virtue and knowledge, which CHRYSIPPUS made neceſſary to divination. He affirmed he knew no perſon who had them, and concluded from thence, that, if he ſhould allow divination, there would be no one found to divine †. Thus may we laugh too, and affirm on long experience, that, if we allowed theological allegory to come from God with all the pretended types, ſymbols, and ſigns, there would be no one found to interpret it, ſo as to fix the ſenſe of it indiſputably: and yet, if the ſenſe be not indiſputably fixed, human impoſture may paſs for divine revelation, and the word of man for the word of God.

IF I would enter into ſuch a detail, in this place, it would be eaſy to collect almoſt innumerable examples out of Jewiſh and Chriſtian writers, to excuſe the laugh, and to juſtify the affirmation. But inſtead of that, I ſhall content myſelf with giving one or two inſtances, that occur to my memory, of the uſe that was made of interpretations of allegory in the Pagan theology.

STROBOEUS has preſerved a paſſage of PORPHYRY, which ſhews that the Pythagoricians labored to diſcover the hidden ſenſe of HOMER, who had ſpoke more darkly about gods and daemons than any of the antients, in order to confirm or improve their own theology by his: and he quotes one of theſe philoſophers, PYTHAGOREUS CHRONIUS, who ſeemed to

* ——— Stoici autem tui negant quemquam, niſi ſapientem, divinum eſſe poſſe. CIC. de Divin. l. 2.

† ——— Vide igitur, ne, etiamſi divinationem tibi eſſe conceſſero- - - - neminem tamen divinum reperire poſſimus. Ibid.

make

make the poet's doctrine conformable to his own, rather than to make his own conformable to the poet's *. But the Stoics were remarkable above all others for putting HOMER and the reſt of the poets to this uſe. HESIOD was put to the ſame uſe, and his fables and allegories ſerved to the ſame impertinent purpoſe as thoſe of HOMER did. His poem was to ſome, what he profeſſes at the entrance of it that he intended it ſhould be, a theological rhapſody concerning the generations of gods. It was to others a mere phyſical allegory concerning the formation of the viſible world; and accordingly we find that VELLEIUS accuſes ZENO, in the firſt book of the nature of the gods, of miſinterpreting HESIOD by attributing the names of JUPITER, of JUNO and VESTA to inanimate beings alone. VARRO, it is ſaid, did the ſame: and thus the poem became to ſome a theogonia, and to others a coſmogonia. Another inſtance of the ſucceſs philoſophers had in their interpretations of allegories and fables, and of their end in making theſe interpretations, follows that which has been quoted: for after ſpeaking of what CHRYSIPPUS had writ in his firſt book of the nature of the gods, CICERO's interlocutor adds, that this philoſopher endeavoured, in the ſecond, to accommodate the fables of ORPHEUS, MUSAEUS, HESIOD and HOMER to what he had advanced, "ut etiam veterrimi poetæ, qui hæc ne ſuſpicati "quidem ſint, Stoici fuiſſe videantur." That the moſt antient poets, who had not even a ſuſpicion that there were any ſuch doctrines, might ſeem to have been Stoicians. Such examples as theſe are ſo far appoſite, that they ſerve to ſhew how ill fitted allegory is to preſerve the true ſenſe of any doctrine, and that an allegorical ſyſtem is eaſily made a noſe of wax, to be turned any way that the interpreters of it pleaſe.

* Nec tam ſe ad poetae opiniones, quàm poetam ad ſuas accommodare nititur.

WHILST paganiſm was thus muffled up in allegory to amuſe the vulgar, and to maintain and propagate ſuperſtition, another art, in ſome degree the reverſe of this, was employed to promote the true ends of natural religion, and the more effectual reformation of the manners of men. The art I mean is that which inſtituted rites and ceremonies to be performed, and doctrines to which they were relative to be taught in ſecret. Antient writers, Pagans and Chriſtians, ſpeak much of theſe myſteries, for ſuch they were called: the former with veneration, the latter often with an abhorrence, that little became thoſe who imitated them in ſo many inſtances, and who ſuffered their own myſterious rites to run eaſily into the very ſame abuſes, into which the others degenerated late. To attempt a minute and circumſtantial account of theſe myſteries, and even to ſeem to give it, would require much greater knowledge of antiquity than I pretend to have, or would take the trouble of acquiring. They who attempt it have been, and always will be, ridiculouſly and vainly employed, whilſt they treat this ſubject as if they had aſſiſted at the celebration of theſe myſteries, or had at leaſt been drivers of the aſs who carried the machines and implements that ſerved in the celebration of them. They write dogmatically about things which could not be known authentically, nor in a detail of particulars, at the time they were in practice. DIAGORAS, the Melian, was proſcribed at * Athens for revealing, or pretending to reveal them: and the poet AESCHYLUS † had like to have been maſſacred on a bare ſuſpicion that the people took at a repreſentation of one of his plays, of ſomething which alluded to them. In a word, theſe rites were kept ſecret under the ſevereſt penalties above two thouſand years ago. How can we hope to have them revealed to us now, by the help of tradition, or hiſtory, wherein we find the relations of other

* SUIDAS. † CLEM. ALEX. Strom. l. 2.

things

things which were of public notoriety much later ſo imperfect and dubious? I pretend, therefore, to nothing more than the mention of a few general notions concerning theſe myſteries, which ſeem probable to me: whatever weight you lay upon them, about which I am not over ſolicitous, they will be ſufficient for my preſent purpoſe and for your information. They will ſerve to ſhew, how men came nearer and nearer to the knowledge of the true God, and a more rational worſhip.

THE theology and the mythology of the heathen world were no doubt vaſtly increaſed by poets, who indulged their imaginations without any other view perhaps than the ornament of their works, and by philoſophers, who having, like PLATO, more imagination than knowledge, endeavoured to conceal their ignorance under the veil of allegorical phyſics and chimerical metaphyſics. Thus gods and daemons and other hypothetical beings were multiplied. Feſtivals and public devotions multiplied with them. Superſtition ſpread, and external religion, which was made up of nothing elſe, floriſhed. But they who inſtituted religion, for the ſake of government, ſaw that ſuch religion as this would not be ſufficient alone to anſwer their end, nor enforce effectually the obligations of public and private morality. It looked no farther than the preſent ſyſtem of things, and in this they obſerved no ſettled diſtinction made by their gods between the religious and the irreligious, the beſt and the worſt of men. It was not ſufficient, they thought therefore, either to juſtify the providence of the gods, or to determine the conduct of men. The imaginary unjuſt diſtribution of good and evil, had been at all times a great ſtumbling block to theiſtical philoſophers: and we ſee accordingly that hypotheſes, contrived to ſolve the difficulty, had obtained in an antiquity beyond our oldeſt traditions. Such was that of the good and evil principle. Such was that of a future ſtate

of rewards and puniſhments, and of a metempſychoſis. Now what they had put to a philoſophical, they put to a political uſe: and the laſt of theſe was at leaſt one principal, and I ſuppoſe the principal, doctrine taught in the myſteries that they inſtituted.

THE myſteries of ISIS and thoſe of MITHRAS ſeem to have been the moſt antient: and the former were thoſe which INACHUS and ORPHEUS carried into Greece. What they were in their original inſtitution, how they were propagated in ſeveral countries under the invocation, to uſe an expreſſion of your church, of different divinities, what alterations from one to another they received, or how thoſe of Eleuſis came to be more univerſal and more revered than the reſt, I am unable to tell, and you I believe not much concerned to know. But if you aſk me how they came to be called myſteries, tho their principal doctrine, the doctrine of a future ſtate, was publicly known, as I think it was, my anſwer is ready. This doctrine, altho known, and the ſolemn rites that belonged to it were myſteries among the Pagans, juſt as the doctrines and rites of baptiſm and the Lord's ſupper were myſteries in the firſt ages of the chriſtian church. A general and confuſed notion of them tranſpired. But neither theſe doctrines, nor the myſtical rites and ceremonies, were explained even to the catechumens, and much leſs to others. Nay the whole inward doctrine of the euchariſty was not opened to all thoſe who received it, to thoſe whom St. AUSTIN calls "tardiores:" and the reaſon he gives for this reſerve, is, that they might not deſpiſe what they ſaw, "ne contemnant quod vident." He thought, it ſeems, that no explanation would prevent this ſo effectually as an air of myſtery maintained by the figurative and aenigmatical terms, in which the fathers affected to ſpeak on all ſuch ſubjects to the public. This precaution was carried ſo far, that a cur-

a curtain was drawn to hide the altar and the prieſt from the ſight of the congregation, when he was about to conſecrate, as I remember to have read in ſome of your writers. Several ages paſſed, before the paſtors of the church thought it ſafe to let the people know, that a few genuflections, a few ſigns of the croſs, a few thumps on the breaſt, and the muttering of a few words, were ſufficient to draw God down from heaven, and to tranſubſtantiate bread and wine into his fleſh and blood.

THIS air of myſtery produced not only the negative good that has been mentioned, it produced likewiſe a poſitive good of much conſequence. The chriſtian fathers found it neceſſary, on one hand, to admit converts thro ſeveral ſtages of preparation into the church, and, on the other, to keep up the fervor of theſe candidates for regeneration, and the conſequence of it, ſalvation. The expedient of myſtery anſwered both purpoſes. It kept them out of the whole ſecret, as long as that was neceſſary: and it excited in the mean time their curioſity, and holy impatience, to be in it. St. AUSTIN, who mentions the firſt, mentions the ſecond purpoſe. He ſpeaks, in one of his epiſtles, of the public prayers made to God, that he would inſpire the catechumens with a deſire of regeneration; "Ut "eis deſiderium regenerationis inſpiraret:" and in another part of his works, he avows the human means that were employed for a very human reaſon, a reaſon drawn from the weakneſs of the human mind. He ſays, that altho the catechumens could have boren a communication of the ſacraments to them, this was not done however, that the more honorably theſe ſacraments were hid, the more earneſtly this communication might be deſired by them. "Etſi catechumenis ſacramenta "fidelium non produntur; non ideo fit, quod ea ferre non "poſſunt; ſed ut ab eis tanto ardentiùs concupiſcantur, quanto "honorabiliùs occultantur."

OTHER

OTHER authorities might be cited, and other inſtances produced, if they were neceſſary; for this was the general policy of the chriſtian church. But there is no need of any authority to confirm that of St. AUSTIN, in ſuch a caſe as this: and the two inſtances I have brought are ſufficient to ſhew, for what reaſons myſtery was eſtabliſhed in the heathen devotions, by ſhewing thoſe for which it was introduced and maintained in the chriſtian devotions. The latter, in this reſpect, were copies of the former: and theſe copies, which we have in our hands, enable us to judge of the originals, which we have not.

THE Chriſtians, the primitive Chriſtians themſelves, could not revere their ſacred myſteries more than the Pagans did theirs. They could not prepare for them, nor aſſiſt at them, with greater attention of mind, with greater purity of heart, nor with greater reverence and awe, than the Pagans prepared for and aſſiſted at theirs. The Pagans confeſſed their crimes: and they went thro public and private purgations, which we may call penitences, long before they could be admitted to initiation. Such, for inſtance, as abſtinence from women and from ſeveral ſorts of food, with different auſterities that are mentioned by PORPHYRY, and that writer of Mileſian tales, APULEIUS; after which the public proclamation "procul "ite profani," and the private examination of every one who preſented himſelf, "an purus ades?" followed conſtantly. No man, who was noted for crimes, durſt be a candidate for initiation: and NERO, as much an emperor and a tyrant as he was, durſt not preſent himſelf as ſuch, after he had killed his mother. We find the diſpoſitions, and the manner, in which they were required to aſſiſt at theſe myſterious rites and ceremonies, deſcribed in terms that might edify the moſt pious and orthodox

dox ears. Let me quote the firſt that occurs to me, tho it is not the ſtrongeſt that might be produced with the pains of a little ſearch. The paſſage is in that oration, which TULLY made on the occaſion of ſome anſwers given by the haruſpices, whom the ſenate had conſulted. In that oration, ſpeaking of thoſe myſteries which CLODIUS had polluted, and exaggerating the crime, he takes notice that they were ſuch as forbid, not only curious, but even wandering eyes, and excluded not only the wicked, but the imprudent. " Non ſolum cu-
" rioſos oculos excludit, ſed etiam errantes——quò non modò
" improbitas, ſed ne imprudentia quidem, poſſit intrare." Such was the general character, ſuch the particular behavior, required of the perſons initiated into theſe ſacred myſteries: and the excitements to the obſervation of all that was thus required, could not be greater; ſince they are ſummed up by TULLY, who had been initiated himſelf, in this, that the initiated learned how to live with joy and to die with better hopes; " cum lætitia vivendi rationem, et cum ſpe meliore moriendi.* They were raiſed " ad praeſentiam et participationem deorum," ſays JAMBLICUS, a bleſſing which the Egyptians firſt enjoyed according to him. Their ſouls were purged and purified, till they became ſuch as they had been in their original ſtate, and before their deſcent into the priſon of the body. When they left the body, they took their flight at once to the iſlands of the bleſſed, nay they became gods, or like to gods, according to ſome ſeraphic doctors of platonician divinity; whilſt thoſe of the prophane, unpurged, unpurified, and clogged by the groſs affections of the body, ſtuck in dirt and wallowed in mire †.

* CIC. de Leg. l. 2. † In coeno et luto volutari. DIOG. LAERT.

SECT.

SECTION IV.

It is eaſy to conceive, by this ſhort account of the heathen myſteries, how well this inward religion, for ſuch I may call it in contradiſtinction to vulgar paganiſm, was calculated to form ſome particular men to virtue and piety, and to promote by conſequence ſo far the good of ſociety, which was the great end of the firſt legiſlators, by means more reaſonable than thoſe of vulgar religion. The celebration of theſe myſteries laſted ſeveral days, and returned often enough, to afford frequent opportunities of initiation to thoſe of both ſexes who were deſirous of it, as well as of confirmation and improvement to thoſe who had been already initiated. Leſſons of morality were thus frequently renewed, habits of piety were ſolemnly maintained, and to enforce them all, that great ſanction, which conſiſts in the rewards and puniſhments of another life, and which had been added very wiſely to the law of nature by human inſtitution, and in belief at leaſt, if not originally and by divine inſtitution, was inculcated ſo, that every man muſt apply it to himſelf, and the impreſſion be laſting.

It may be ſaid perhaps that no reformation of manners, no degree of virtue and piety, beyond thoſe which vulgar paganiſm was ſufficient to procure, can be juſtly aſcribed to theſe inſtitutions; whereas they maintained much, at leaſt, of the ſame rank polytheiſm in belief, and the ſame rank idolatry in practice. If this be ſaid, the objection will be eaſily anſwered, as far as it relates to the effect they had, by running a parallel, as I ſhall do in another eſſay, between pagan and chriſtian reformation of manners; for if it appears, as I think it will, that the latter has in this reſpect on the whole no advantage

to

to boaſt above the former, ſome reformation muſt be allowed to have been wrought by the pagan ſyſtem of religion; after which there can remain no diſpute whether this reformation was owing to the inward and hidden, rather than to the outward and public, part of this ſyſtem.

But I conſider here the theology and religion of the heathen with regard to their nature, not to their effects, and I ſhall proceed therefore to obſerve, that by the myſteries hitherto ſpoken of, I mean only ſuch as are called the leſſer, and as ſeem to have been preparatory to the greater, which remain to be ſpoken of. There were certain ſtages thro which men were admitted by ſlow ſteps into the whole myſtery of chriſtianity. So they were admitted likewiſe into that of heatheniſm. The firſt legiſlators contented themſelves to eſtabliſh a vulgar religion, in compliance with the ignorance and ſuperſtition of the ſavage vulgar. But they prepared, at the ſame time, the means of ſupplying its defects, and of leading men little by little, and by ſuch a progreſſion as their different talents and characters rendered them capable of making, to a better knowledge of natural theology and natural religion, from fiction to truth, from allegory to that which allegory was intended to ſignify. There was a ſtate of purgation, a ſtate of initiation, and a ſtate of conſummation. The two firſt were, I believe, thoſe of the leſſer, and the laſt that of the greater myſteries.

He who has been curious to examine the religious notions of rude, ignorant, and half ſtupid people, in the pale of the chriſtian church as well as out of it, will not be apt to wonder that there were many in the heathen world who remained contented with the vulgar religion, and little curious about the myſteries; nor that they were led rather by example than by

reflection to initiation, when it became almoſt as general among them as baptiſm is among us, and to the belief of a future ſtate. Now ſuch as theſe might have been revolted againſt the myſteries, if they had found the gods they were accuſtomed to adore wholly degraded in them. Theſe gods therefore were to keep their places in ſome ſort, "ſuus cuique "honos;" tho many fabulous ſtories about them were exploded, or elſe were repreſented as allegories not facts, and explained in a better ſenſe. The doctrine too of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, would have made leſs impreſſion on ſuch minds, perhaps, if it had not been taught to the eyes, as well as to the ears, by ſolemn ceremonies and pompous ſhews. Ceremonies, therefore, and ſhews ſeem to have been inſtituted, and to have been made parts of theſe myſteries. But then there were other perſons, and the number of theſe increaſed as philoſophy came to be more and more cultivated, who could not bear to have the abſurdities of polytheiſm, however mitigated, impoſed upon them in any ſort, nor think it religion to worſhip men who had been made gods by poetical licence, with all their vices about them. They could not aſſiſt at the ridiculous rites of idolatry, nor be ſpectators of all the puppet ſhews of devotion, without being provoked to laughter or to indignation.

I CAN eaſily believe, that the fooliſh creeds, and the burleſque rites of paganiſm were rendered, in the preparatory myſteries, a little leſs ſhocking to the common ſenſe of thoſe in whom knowledge began to get the better of prejudice. But this reformation and improvement could not be carried far at once. Allegory ſerved to diſguiſe ignorance, and to muffle up even knowledge in myſtery among the vulgar. To cure this abuſe, to take off theſe maſks, and to lay allegory aſide whenever it did not ſerve to illuſtrate truth, and to improve or facilitate know-

knowledge, required time: and men, who had been bred in darkneſs, were to be accuſtomed to the light by degrees. This, I imagine, that the myſteries did, and were contrived to do. If too much light had been let in at once upon the initiated, they would have been dazzled and hurt by it. Rather than ſuffer the groſſeſt objects of their ſuperſtition to be ſuddenly removed, theſe idiots might have clung to them the more cloſely: juſt as we have ſeen in France, that popular tumults have ariſen when ſome biſhops have attempted to take away images, and to forbid devotions, in which the common people had been too long indulged, by the connivance or by the fraud of their paſtors. On the other hand, the reformation of vulgar religion, which was wrought by the leſſer myſteries, was too little certainly for thoſe who were able to frame true notions of a Supreme Being, and of the worſhip due to him from his creatures. Thus it became neceſſary to make a ſort of political compoſition with error: it became neceſſary for the inſtitutors of religions to ſeparate the few from the many, and to carry the firſt on alone from initiation to conſummation, from the leſſer to the greater myſteries. There are good, and, I think, ſufficient grounds to be perſuaded, that the whole ſyſtem of polytheiſm was unravelled in the greater myſteries, or that no more of it was retained than what might be rendered conſiſtent with monotheiſm, with the belief of one ſupreme ſelf-exiſtent Being. Now on the principles on which this was done, ſome of the eſtabliſhed ceremonies of vulgar religion might ſeem quite innocent, and others might be tolerated. Some indulgence, and even a kind of occaſional conformity to them, could not be ſafely refuſed, in countries where ſuch ſuperſtitions had long prevailed; where they were incorporated into the very frame of government, and where powerful bodies of men had a particular intereſt in the ſupport of them.

SECTION V.

SINCE I have mentioned the compatibility of ſome remains of the groſſeſt polytheiſm with monotheiſm, and the principles on which the few might conform to the many, at leaſt in the exteriors of religion; it is neceſſary that I ſhould explain my ſelf on theſe heads, which contain the ſum of theology or the firſt philoſophy, as it was underſtood by the moſt intelligent of the heathen, even in thoſe countries where idolatry ſeemed to triumph the moſt.

IT cannot be proved, without the help of the old teſtament, nor very well with it, as I have hinted above, that the unity of God was the primitive belief of mankind: neither does it appear to my apprehenſion, that in fact it could be ſo, according to all the rules of judging that may be drawn from reaſon and analogy. But yet I think it ſufficiently evident, from reaſon and analogy both, that this firſt and great principle of natural theology could not fail to be diſcovered, as ſoon as ſome men began to contemplate themſelves and all the objects that ſurrounded them, and to puſh their philoſophical reſearches up from cauſes that muſt be the effects of other cauſes to a firſt, intelligent, ſelf-exiſtent cauſe of all things. Accordingly, we find that this diſcovery had been made in Egypt, and all the eaſtern nations that were famous for learning and knowledge, long before the dates of our moſt antient memorials: whereas the ſame diſcovery does not appear to have been made by thoſe people, whom we are able to view in theſe memorials, before they emerged out of ignorance into the light of knowledge and philoſophical truth.

If I would deſcend into particular proofs, to confirm by the teſtimony of antient writers, what I advance on a probability that reaſon and analogy will ſupport, I ſhould not be at a loſs to furniſh them. But I conſider, that the work is done to my hands, in a much better manner than I ſhould be able to do it, and that it would be ridiculous to diſplay my little pedlar's ſhop of learning before you, when ſo immenſe a ſtorehouſe of it lies open in the true intellectual ſyſtem of the univerſe. There you will find a full and ſuperabundant collection of proofs that demonſtrate, beyond a poſſibility of doubting, the unity of God to have been acknowledged by the moſt antient of the idolatrous nations; tho they may not demonſtrate, as I think they do not, that this was the primitive faith of mankind: becauſe we ſee that the things of this world are in a perpetual rotation, and becauſe in ſeveral countries, at ſeveral periods, men may have gone from idolatry to true religion, and have fallen from this back again into idolatry, as we know that divers nations have gone from barbarity to politeneſs, and then have finiſhed the round, and have returned from politeneſs to barbarity. Euſebius, and a multitude of other writers after him, would have us believe, that it was the particular prerogative of God's choſen people to be in poſſeſſion of this knowledge, tho the contrary may be proved, even from his own writings, as well as by the confeſſion of ſaint Auſtin, and of other fathers of the church: and Joſephus * aſſerts, that Abraham was the firſt who dared to ſay, that there is but one God. Abraham ſeems, according to this hiſtorian, to have derived his knowledge of the one true God from philoſophical obſervation and meditation, before he became ſo well acquainted with the Supreme Being as he was afterwards, when God entered into a covenant with him. He could not derive it by tradition from his anceſtors; ſince Joſe-

* Ant. Jud. l. 1. c. 7.

PHUS

PHUS and PHILO, and many of the rabbins, affirm, that the father of the faithful was bred an idolater. Shall we think it ſtrange now, that other men ſhould diſcover, by their meditations on the works of God, what ABRAHAM diſcovered? Has this fundamental article then of all true theology, ſo little proportion to our clear and beſt determined ideas? Or is it ſo repugnant to all the phaenomena of nature? Much otherwiſe. It is ſo well proportioned to one, and ſo agreeable to both, that we ſhould be juſtly ſurprized to obſerve the affectation of reſtraining this knowledge to the patriarchs and their deſcendants, if it was not as eaſy as it is to diſcern that the Jews meant to do greater honor to their nation, and to reflect greater authority on their revelations, and that the Chriſtians thought it proper to maintain this groundleſs aſſertion, in order to ſhew the preparation for, as well as the neceſſity of, a new revelation to the Jews and Gentiles both.

BUT let us not be deceived, by the vanity of one, nor by the artifice of the other. God never left himſelf without a witneſs, which witneſs is the whole ſyſtem of his works; tho human reaſon muſt be cultivated to diſcover this, as well as other truths, and tho it has not been therefore diſcovered alike by all people, and at all times. All truth requires ſome ſearch, and many are to be acquired by labor. But there is no one that requires leſs labor than this, as there is no one that deſerves or rewards our ſearch ſo well. Thus I think, and in thinking thus I adore the goodneſs of the Supreme Being. Biſhop WILKINS * ſays, in his principles of natural religion, that "the things which "diſtinguiſh human nature from all other things are the chief "principles and foundations of religion, namely, the appre-"henſion of a deity, and an expectation of a future ſtate af-"ter this life, which no other creature below man doth par-

* L. 2. c. 1.

"take

" take of----it is not reaſon in the general, which is the " form of human nature, becauſe there are ſome degrees of " ratiocination diſcernible in the brute creation, and ſuch a " natural ſagacity as at leaſt bears a near reſemblance to rea- " ſon." Thus the good biſhop makes the difference between reaſon in man and in other animals very rightly to conſiſt in the degree, not in the kind, without perceiving how far this conceſſion of an apparent truth would carry him in the diſpute about ſouls, and material and immaterial ſpirits. But even in the caſe before us it will not ſerve his purpoſe, nor evince that reaſon, as it is determined to actions of religion, is the particular form of human nature. It will prove at moſt that ſome men have, and that no other ſpecies of animals has in general, nor in particular inſtances, the faculty we call reaſon in ſuch a degree, as to render them capable of diſcovering the exiſtence of the Supreme Being, and the duties of natural religion. I ſaid ſome men, becauſe even among the creatures that are all commonly, but perhaps erroneouſly, comprehended in this ſpecies on account of their outward form, there are ſtupid ſavages, of whom it ſeems lawful to doubt, whether they are able to make greater diſcoveries concerning God and religion, than the half reaſoning elephant. Upon the whole matter, they who ſuppoſe all men incapable to attain a full knowledge of natural theology and religion without revelation, take from us the very eſſence and form of man, according to the biſhop, and deny that any of us have that degree of reaſon, which is neceſſary to diſtinguiſh our ſpecies, and ſufficient to lead us to the unity of a firſt intelligent cauſe of all things.

Now ſince the unity of God might be known by a due uſe of human reaſon, and ſince it was actually known to the antient legiſlators, who eſtabliſhed the myſteries ſpoken of for the ſupport of religion, and religion for the ſupport of government,

ment, it cannot ſeem marvellous, that this doctrine was taught in the celebration of the greater myſteries. The marvel would be, if it had not been taught in them. But then there is as little room to wonder, that the ſame men ſhould eſtabliſh the belief of a divine monarchy, as they did eſtabliſh it. By degrading the pagan gods, they deſtroyed the ariſtocracy of heaven: and by reaſoning from human ideas of order, they ran of courſe into an hypotheſis, which has been adopted in ſome manner or other by the jewiſh, the chriſtian, the mahometan, and every other ſyſtem of theology. They ſuppoſed that the making and governing the world required the miniſtration of a multitude of inferior beings, beings not eternal, but produced in time by emanation, or by ſome other inconceivable manner of generation, concerning all which there has been more abſurdity propagated by Pagans and Chriſtians, whether heretics or orthodox, than all the bedlams of the world can match. When they reaſoned à poſteriori, from the works to the exiſtence of one God, they reaſoned well, and they arrived at truth. But when they reaſoned in the ſame manner from oeconomical and political inſtitutions of human wiſdom, they reaſoned ill, and fell into error. This error however was pious error: and pious error is more excuſable than pious fraud. They dared not preſume to ſuppoſe the ſupreme incomprehenſible and ineffable Being employed conſtantly, nor at all immediately, about human affairs, and yet they thought divine providence neceſſary in the general conduct of theſe, as they diſcerned plainly that it was neceſſary to preſerve and rule the great machine of the univerſe. Much leſs dared they ſuppoſe this Being to be the tutelary local divinity of any one people, and much leſs ſtill to be an earthly king in the literal acceptation of the word. They were not enough familiarized with the belief of divine revelations, to frame ſuch conceptions as theſe.

Some of their philoſophers, indeed, refined ſo ſublimely their ſpeculations about the Supreme Being, that they grew quite unintelligible. God was, in their conceit, above all eſſence, tho exiſtent, above all intelligence, tho intelligent. He was in all things:

"Jupiter eſt quodcunque vides, quocunque moveris."

He pervaded, he animated the whole world, and like the ſoul gave life and motion to all the parts of it. In him they lived, and moved, and had their being. Some of theſe men therefore, whilſt they ſeemed to worſhip the parts of this viſible corporeal ſyſtem, might really worſhip the inviſible God alone, in the various manifeſtations of his wiſdom, energy and power. I ſay ſome of them; becauſe it muſt be confeſſed, that ſome, even of thoſe who had been conſummated by admiſſion into the greateſt myſteries, were not entirely orthodox on this head. They adopted notions more intelligible, and leſs unworthy of the deity than many that have been mentioned, but ſuch however as had too near an analogy to man and to the affairs of mankind. They imagined a divine monarchy on a human plan, the adminiſtration of which was not carried on by the immediate agency of God himſelf, but mediately, as in terreſtrial monarchies, by that of inferior agents, according to the ranks and the provinces allotted to them. Such were the celeſtial gods; the ſun, the moon, the ſtars, or the ſpirits more properly who inhabited and preſided in them, who directed their motions, and maintained their influences. Such again, but in a lower order, were the aethereal and aërial daemons, the genii and the lares, who dwelled below the moon, and had little elſe in charge but what related to man, and even to particular men. Such again were heroes and public benefactors, who might well be admitted into the celeſtial hierarchy; for

by the very doctrine of the myſteries, private devotions, and the exerciſe of private virtues could render men like to gods here, and gods hereafter.

SINCE greater purity of manners, and a more internal devotion were required of the initiated than of the vulgar, it is but reaſonable to conclude, that in the myſteries the gods were reformed as well as their worſhippers, that JUPITER was no longer the whore-maſter he had been repreſented, nor MERCURY the pimp, nor VENUS the common ſtrumpet, and ſo on. But ſtill it muſt be confeſſed, that thoſe fictitious divinities, which ſuperſtition and poetry had invented, which the leſſer myſteries had preſerved, and which the greater had tolerated, were alike numerous and ridiculous, as well as the rites and ceremonies inſtituted in honor of them, and practiſed even by thoſe who were conſummated in the greater myſteries. Thus in the eleuſinian orgia, for inſtance, not to quote thoſe of BACCHUS, the moſt extravagant and the ſooneſt corrupted of any, the wanderings of CERES in ſearch of her daughter were dramatically repreſented: and the initiated ran about like frantic people with lighted torches in their hands.

IF this apparent idolatry moves your indignation, call to mind the diſtinction of a worſhip of Latria and a worſhip of Dulia. They, who acknowledged but one God, could pay the firſt to that God alone: they could not be idolaters. They might honor the other divinities, as your church honors her ſaints, by the ſecond. If this ridiculous worſhip moves your laughter, have a care: it was in thoſe days juſt as it is in ours, and in paganiſm juſt as it is in chriſtianity. The intelligent pagans, who were conſummated in the myſteries, could explain away, no doubt, ſome of the apparent abſurdities of theſe rites, and give good prudential reaſons for their compliance with others.

others. CELSUS had boaſted that he was fully acquainted with the chriſtian religion, and on that ſuppoſed acquaintance had preſumed to cenſure it. ORIGEN, as I find him quoted by CUDWORTH, ſhews CELSUS that it was not leſs impertinent in him to pretend to be well informed of chriſtian theology, than it would be in a ſtranger who ſojourned in Egypt to pretend to be well informed of the Egyptian theology, tho he had not been inſtructed in the myſteries of it by the prieſts who were alone able to inſtruct him. ORIGEN adds, that not only among the Egyptians, but among all other nations, who had beſides their religious fables a ſecret doctrine, the religious rites were performed rationally by ingenious perſons, whilſt the ſuperficial vulgar looked no further in the obſervation of them than the external ſymbol or ceremony. This was a full anſwer to CELSUS: and ſo far ORIGEN makes the caſe of paganiſm and chriſtianity the ſame.

Now if they were the ſame in his time, ſure I am they are the ſame in this reſpect in ours: and that you may ſee this the more clearly, and learn not to paſs too raſh a cenſure on the poor pagans, let us feign for a moment that ABAMMON, or any other heathen prieſt you pleaſe, is riſen from the dead. He is curious in the firſt place to viſit Egypt and the Eaſt; but he finds them ſubdued by ignorant and barbarous people, and no traces left of their antient civility, policy, and erudition. The countries devaſted, the cities laid in ruins, and none of the colleges of the learned to be found. He haſtens away to the Weſt; for he is told that in thoſe regions that border on the Atlantic ſea arts and ſciences have revived, and philoſophy has fixed her throne. As he advances thither, he finds ſome faint reſemblance of the plenty and of the magnificence of antient Egypt. Stately temples ſtrike his eye, and excite his curioſity the moſt. He obſerves that one is dedicated to the Trinity. He takes

this to be ſome triad into which TYPHO had mangled the deity, and he laments that ISIS had not joined the parts again together; for he cannot be ſuppoſed to know what the Nicean council has decreed for this purpoſe. He obſerves, that another is dedicated to the mother of God, and imagines that CYBELE may be adored in it. Others he obſerves in great number, and all diſtinguiſhed by ſome particular invocation. Whilſt he is thus employed, a proceſſion comes by. ABAMMON ſees with pleaſure the prieſts of ISIS attend it in their white garments, and with their heads ſhaved according to the Egyptian rite; but he is at a loſs to gueſs what a croſs of wood, which is carried before them, can mean. He remembers, that malefactors were executed in ſome countries on ſuch an inſtrument of cruelty; and therefore his ſurprize increaſes when he is told that the ſon of God ſuffered on it to ſatisfy divine juſtice, and to expiate the ſins of mankind. This calls to his mind perhaps the human ſacrifices that were ſo long in uſe among the Phoenicians and other nations. But he is ſtill in doubt; for among them men were ſacrificed to appeaſe the gods, and here a god is the victim. He follows the proceſſion into one of the temples. The ſervice begins; he gets as near the altar as he can. He ſees no preparations for any ſacrifice, but obſerves that the prieſt holds ſomething white and round in his hand. He aſks what it is, and is told that it is a wafer. He obſerves him pour ſome liquor into a cup. He aſks, and is told that it is wine. A moment after the prieſt having held up this wafer and this cup ſucceſſively over his head, the people proſtrate themſelves in acts of adoration. They bid him do the ſame; for they aſſure him that the wafer is become the body, and the wine the blood, of God. The ſervice over, he has time to ſurvey the church. He ſees altars on every ſide, and pictures or ſtatues over all. He ſees tapers and lamps burning even by day. The pictures and ſtatues he concludes to be the

gods

gods of this people, and the tapers and lamps to have been lighted at ſome ſacred fire, at that perhaps which ZOROASTER brought from heaven. He ſtares at an old man with a long beard, looking out of the clouds at a young man tied to a ſtake and whipped, and at a white pigeon hovering in the midſt of the picture. As he proceeds on his journey of curioſity, he ſees in another temple the ſame old man talking to a beautiful virgin, the virgin ſeeming to receive orders from him, and thruſting a little child head foremoſt into a mill, four monſtrous beaſts, ſuch as Africa never produced, aſſiſting twelve venerable perſons to turn the mill, before which an arch-prieſt, with a tripple crown on his head, and a golden cup in his hand, is repreſented kneeling. The arch-prieſt receives wafers that fall from the mill into the cup. He gives them to a man who wears a red cap; the man of the red cap gives them to one who wears a broad pointed cap; he of the broad pointed cap gives them to one who wears a ſquare black cap; and he of the ſquare black cap doles them about to the people. ABAMMON obſerves over the door of the ſame temple an animal that has four heads, the head of a man, the head of an ox, the head of an eagle, and the head of a lion. He obſerves an aſs, to whom peculiar reſpect ſeems to be paid, and whole flocks of ſheep and whole droves of cattle. Theſe he takes for ſymbols; and they have ſo plain an alluſion to thoſe of Egypt, when Egypt was the miſtreſs of ſymbolical theology, that ABAMMON would be ready to carry himſelf back to his own age and country in imagination, if the herds of ſwine, that have their place too in this ſacred painting, did not give him a good deal of ſcandal. The people he converſes with, ſwear to him in the moſt ſolemn manner that they adore one God alone, and that they abhor polytheiſm and idolatry. He hears them, takes his leave and goes away perſuaded that they are polytheiſts as much, and idolaters more than he or any of his fathers

fathers were. This fable may ſerve to ſhew you that it is not only unreaſonable, but unſafe to cenſure any religion raſhly and without ſufficient information, as pagans have calumniated judaiſm and chriſtianity, and Jews and Chriſtians, paganiſm and mahometaniſm. The weapons of retaliation are always at hand, tho thoſe of defence are not: and we ſee that even the chriſtian religion is not invulnerable. But it is time I ſhould proceed to other corruptions of philoſophy, of the firſt eſpecially, and to other forms under which error has been propagated.

SECTION VI.

What has been ſaid above, has been ſaid generally and hypothetically; for what man in his ſenſes would preſume to be particular or poſitive on matters of ſo great antiquity, and ſo imperfectly and darkly delivered down on authorities for the moſt part very precarious? I think, however, that it is probable. It is probable that allegory, the refuge of ignorance, the veil of error, and the inſtrument of metaphyſical and theological deception in its abuſe, was one great ſupport of paganiſm. It rendered the outſide of this religion pompous and ſhewiſh: and this was enough to raiſe and to maintain a reſpect and veneration for it in the minds of the vulgar, who never look further than the outſide, and who are fond of the marvellous. It is probable, that in the myſteries inſtituted by the firſt legiſlators to be a further ſupport of religion, ſuch allegories and ſymbols as were kept in uſe, and ſuch as were more rationally invented for inſtruction, not for deception, were explained in ſuch a manner as to ſerve all the purpoſes of morality, and to form men to be better citizens, by making them better men, than it was thought that civil laws and inſtitutions alone could oblige them to be. It is probable, in the laſt place, that the few who

who were conſummated in theſe myſteries, and to whom the hidden doctrine was revealed, acknowledged the unity of the Godhead, learned to join a ſort of mitigated polytheiſm with monotheiſm, and, tho they conformed in the public worſhip, to have their private belief, as I am perſuaded that you have yours.

It is plain enough, that the knowledge of the one true God would have been acquired by men, and would have been preſerved in the world, if no ſuch people as the Jews had ever been: and nothing can be more impertinent than the hypotheſis, that this people, the leaſt fit perhaps on many accounts that could have been choſen, was choſen to preſerve this knowledge. It was acquired, and it was preſerved independently of them among the heathen philoſophers, and it might have become, nay it did probably become, the national belief in countries unknown to us, or even in thoſe who were fallen back into ignorance before they appear in the traditions we have; juſt as it became the firſt principle of religion among the inhabitants of the Theban dynaſty, * who held that there was no God but one, and this one God was repreſented under a human figure by ſome, with an egg, the ſymbol of the world, coming out of his mouth; with a ſcepter and a belt in his hand, and with other emblems. Thus he was deſcribed by Porphyry, as Eusebius relates, and what other Being can we underſtand to be meant by this deſcription but that God who ſpake, and the world was made?

Thus the theology of the heathen was founded on original truth, but was corrupted afterwards, as other theologies have been, in its progreſs, and by the extention of it. The heathens, at leaſt all of them who deſerve to be quoted, acknowledged one ſole Supreme Being, the oldeſt of all beings, ac-

* Plut. de Iside et Osiride.

cording

cording to THALES, becauſe unmade or unproduced, that is, ſelf-exiſtent, and becauſe he alone is ſo *. But then they corrupted their ideas of the majeſty of this Being, by thoſe which they had of human majeſty; for, by meaning to think with more reverence, they thought unworthily of God. They loſt ſight of him, if I may be allowed ſuch an expreſſion, and ſuffered inferior imaginary beings to intercept a worſhip due to him alone. They reaſoned ſo little or ſo ill, on other notions much better aſſociated with this notion of a God, ſuch as thoſe of omniſcience, of omnipreſence, and of that energy of omnipotence which is ſufficient by one ſimple act of the will, for thus we muſt ſpeak to ſpeak intelligibly, to create and govern an univerſe, that they thought it much more agreeable to nature and truth to account for all the phaenomena of the phyſical and moral worlds by ſuppoſing the agency of ſecond and third gods, of ſuperceleſtial and celeſtial divinities, and of daemons, than to have recourſe to the firſt God, who dwelled in darkneſs unpenetrable, or in light that blinded the human ſight; for both theſe images were employed, and both ſignify the ſame thing. Thus they attempted to reconcile monotheiſm with a ſort of mitigated polytheiſm; for ſuch, at leaſt, I think it was rendered by thoſe conſummated in the myſteries, and ſuch I called it before; tho PLUTARCH ſays expreſſly, in the place I have juſt now quoted, not only that the moſt antient Egyptians held the unity of God, but alſo that they believed no mortal could be a God; which opinion was ſufficient of itſelf to degrade numberleſs beings, that went under the vague and equivocal denomination of gods,

THIS ſyſtem, made up of monotheiſm and of ſomething very near akin, nearer than they who held it imagined, to a polytheiſm, inconſiſtent with the former, proved itſelf to be a very

* DIOG. LAER.

rank

rank ſoil: and immenſe crops of error ſprung up from it, of error more ingenious and more plauſible than the ſuperſtitious opinions of ſavage nations, but yet as real. Tho the belief of many inferior gods did not deſtroy the belief of one ſupreme, it maintained however a ſort of idolatrous worſhip, ſince it maintained a ſort of polytheiſm. For as we cannot ſuppoſe that the vulgar, the uninitiated, adored the true God even intentionally, ſo we cannot ſuppoſe that the initiated, nor even the conſummated, held conſtantly in mind ſome ſuch caſuiſtical diſtinction as that of Latria and Dulia, when they offered ſacrifices to other divinities and invoked them directly. That learned man CUDWORTH ſeems to think more favorably even of the vulgar, ſomewhere in his famous fourth chapter: and I am not ignorant that the doctrine of a mediation between God and man was eſtabliſhed in the heathen theology. But I know too, that the ſuſpicion I have may be juſtified by the example of Chriſtians, who hold a mediation likewiſe: and of theſe the former ſeem the moſt excuſable. The Chriſtian believes that he may have acceſs at all times to the throne of grace; but the poor heathen, filled with a religious horror, durſt not approach the divine monarch except thro the mediation of his miniſters. Aetherial and aërial daemons ſtood in the loweſt rank of ſuperior powers. To theſe he addreſſed himſelf, if they were evil to ſoften their malice, if they were good to obtain their mediation with the celeſtial, and by them with the ſuperceleſtial gods. He who durſt not preſume to think that the prayers of men could reach to theſe, might offer up ſacrifices and prayers to thoſe.

PHILOSOPHERS and prieſts, who led the multitude in matters of ſcience and religion, were the ſame men in Egypt and the antient kingdoms of the Eaſt for many ages, how much ſoever they were diſtinguiſhed in later times and in other countries.

Whilſt they continued ſuch, they profited alternately, in one character, of what they did, in another. Philoſophers in proſe and verſe helped to fill the calendar of the prieſts: and theology became the aſſiſtant of philoſophy wherever ſhe was wanted. Thus, in the caſe before us, when philoſophers had once eſtabliſhed a divine monarchy, at the head of which they placed the firſt God, enthroned in darkneſs, or hid by exceſs of light, creating and governing all things by ſeveral orders of inferior beings, there was a ſort of gradation formed from man to God moſt inconſiſtently with ſome other of their notions. In favor of this gradation, and to make it appear the ſhorter, the ſouls of men were deemed immortal and of a celeſtial origin. They were raiſed up, at leaſt, to the very confines of divinity: and daemons, and beings ſuperior to daemons, had little precedence above them, if any. They were confined indeed to human bodies, and degraded to animate theſe ſyſtems of organized matter by a temporary union with them, but they returned afterwards to their proper and kindred ſtars. The others were confined too, and had their reſpective powers and provinces allotted to them, in the general government even of ſublunary affairs.

Theology did not fail to build on foundations philoſophy had laid: and the profeſſors of both improved the opportunity they had of feigning a cloſe correſpondence between heaven and earth. They aſſumed, that they had the means of knowing what was decreed above, that they could diſcloſe the will of the gods, avert their anger, procure their favor, and exerciſe a coercive power over daemons. They imagined ſpirits that belonged to the ſeveral planets, fiery and aërial, aquatic and terreſtrial: ſo that men, and not men alone, but all other animals, plants, metals, and ſtones, partook of theſe different natures, and of the different influences which deſcended from above.

above. The diſtinction of good and evil daemons was extremely uſeful, in accounting for the phyſical and moral phaenomena; and it doubled the fees of the prieſts. Accordingly, this diſtinction had been eſtabliſhed in the remoteſt antiquity, when philoſophers did, what they do ſtill, and inſtead of tracing cauſes up gradually from their effects, take the leſs laborious taſk of inventing them at once and by a ſally of imagination. JUSTIN the martyr found our chriſtian devil precipitated from heaven, in the nineteenth book of HOMER's Iliad. PLUTARCH quotes EMPEDOCLES for writing, that the evil daemons had been driven from thence by the gods: and you may have the word of MARSILIUS FICINUS, in his diſſertation on the apology of SOCRATES, that PLATO had heard in Egypt how JUPITER caſt the impure daemons into hell, as well as he had learned from PHERECYDES of Syros, either by tradition or by his writings, how ſeveral of theſe ſpirits had rebelled againſt God under the conduct of OPHIONEUS. Theſe reprobate ſpirits became the inſtruments, or rather the authors of all phyſical and moral evil: and the protection of ſuch as had not fallen from this purity was ſought, to prevent or remove this malignant influence. The one procured to men peace of mind, and health of body. The others inſpired luſts, inflamed paſſions, and, entering into the bodies of men as well as of other animals, tormented and diſtorted their limbs, and plaid a thouſand extravagant pranks in the wantonneſs of their power and malice.

SUCH abſurdities as theſe, and many others which I will not take the trouble to collect, being grafted on a few true principles, compoſed the theological wiſdom of the Egyptians and the Chaldaeans, and corrupted the whole maſs. I ſay their theological, for their political and moral wiſdom deſerves to be mentioned without a ſneer. The relations of it, and

of the effects of it, which we find in HERODOTUS, DIODORUS SICULUS, and other antient authors, inſpire us with admiration and reſpect: and it is not poſſible to account for the folly and madneſs of men on theſe theological ſubjects, who were ſo reaſonable and ſo wiſe on all others, except by reſolving it into the vanity of philoſophers and the craft of prieſts. If theſe men had pretended to none of this chimerical knowledge, but had contented themſelves to teach in the ſimplicity of truth, the little we are able to know of the divine nature and the firſt philoſophy, their ſyſtems, which they had the rage of extending, would have been too narrow for their vanity; and their wealth, which they had the rage of increaſing by this lucrative trade, would have been too little for their avarice.

IT is hard to ſay which was greater, the impudence of their pretenſions, the art with which they conducted them, or the ſucceſs they had in impoſing them on mankind. The ſky was ſpread like the great volume of fate before them. They and their adepts alone could read in it, and diſcover the ſecrets it contained. The whole myſtery of celeſtial influences was known to them alone. They could procure them, remove them, change them, and fix them to certain portions of matter, or even fix the ſpirits themſelves, who directed theſe influences, to ſtatues prepared by the rules of their magical art. They had myſterious methods of diſentangling the ſoul from corporeal incumberments, and preparing it for every kind of ſupernatural illumination. The mind was compoſed for prophetic dreams, the eyes were ſtrengthened for celeſtial viſions. They received inſpiration, and they contemplated the gods that gave it. How they underſtood this contemplation, how they ſaw the forms of the gods, * and how the preſence of the

* Praeſentiam ſaepe divi ſuam declarant. Saepe viſae formae deorum. CIC. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

gods

gods was declared to them, might be explained, perhaps, in much as intelligible a manner as the preſence of daemons in their ſtatues was explained. Suppoſe a wall of looking-glaſs, and ſo diſpoſed at the ſame time as to occaſion an eccho *. Your figure and your voice too will be reflected from it, and you will be in ſome ſenſe in that wall. I hurry over all theſe impertinences, and I conclude by ſaying, that from this conſpiracy of philoſophy and theology, in the eſtabliſhment of theurgic and natural magic, have proceeded all the folly and knavery of judicial aſtrology, of horoſcopes, of ſpells, of charms, of taliſmans, of wizards, of witches, and of roſycrucians, and all the enthuſiaſm, blaſphemy, and ſuperſtition that have accompanied theſe excommunicated perſons and things, and that might have been reproached with great reaſon, upon many occaſions, to the orthodox perſons themſelves who excommunicated both. I ſay might have been reproached, and I ſay it with reaſon; ſince many of the opinions which theſe orthodox perſons hold, or have held, may be traced up thro the ſame ſchools, thro which the greateſt extravagancies of aſtrologers, magicians, and roſycrucians have deſcended to theſe days. But we muſt not ſtop here. We muſt purſue the propagation of error in higher inſtances than theſe, and in ſuch as prevail under ſome form or other even at this day, even among men the moſt enlightened in our enlightened age.

Pagan theiſts, who deemed it too great preſumption to worſhip the Supreme Being, might well have thought it ſtill more preſumptuous to dogmatize about his nature and attributes: and ſince they held the unity of the firſt cauſe of all things, they ſhould have ſeen the abſurdity and inconſiſtency of analyzing this monad into ſeveral principles, and of aſſum-

* Mars. Ficin.

ing

ing other ſuperceleſtial and ſupereſſential beings. All this was done however, the abſurdity was put in practice, and the inconſiſtency was admitted into the firſt philoſophy. Reaſon was overborne in this caſe by affections and paſſions, as reaſon is in almoſt every caſe where that rational animal man is to decide, and exceſſive curioſity and exceſſive vanity prevailed againſt the plaineſt dictates of common ſenſe. God has proportioned, in every reſpect, our means of knowledge to our ſtation here, and to our real wants in it. The bodies, that ſurround us, operate continually on us: and their operations concern not only our well or ill being, but our very being. We are fitted therefore to acquire, by the help of our ſenſes properly employed, by experiment and induſtry, ſuch a degree of human knowledge about them as is ſufficient for the neceſſary uſes of human life, and no more. In like manner, the knowledge of the Creator is on many accounts neceſſary to ſuch a creature as man: and therefore we are made able to arrive, by a proper exerciſe of our mental faculties, from a knowledge of God's works to a knowledge of his exiſtence, and of that infinite power and wiſdom which are demonſtrated to us in them. Our knowledge concerning God goes no further. We are in abſolute ignorance of the real eſſence and inward conſtitution of every ſenſible object. How much leſs reaſon is there to expect any knowledge of the manner of being, and of the nature and eſſence of the inviſible God, or of his phyſical and moral attributes, beyond that which his works, the effects of his nature and attributes, communicate to us! This degree, this ſufficient degree of knowledge concerning God is a fixed point, on one ſide of which lies atheiſm, and metaphyſical and theological blaſphemy too often on the other.

NOTWITHSTANDING this which has been ſaid, and which appears to be of the utmoſt evidence, philoſophers have proceeded,

ceeded, without any regard to it, from the moſt early ages: and the whole ſum of theology has been in every age a confuſed rhapſody of diſcordant, fluctuating hypotheſes. The ſcience to which they pretended was unattainable. Their doctrines therefore, tho dogmatically taught, and implicitly received in their ſeveral ſchools, were nothing more than arbitrary hypotheſes: and hypotheſes being ſo extravagantly prolific, that one often engenders twenty, it is no wonder that the confuſion increaſed, that the more theſe doctrines were explained the darker they grew, and that the latter pythagoricians and platonicians were, if poſſible, leſs intelligible than their maſters, and all thoſe who had gone before them. I mention theſe particularly, becauſe they were the great theological doctors of Greece, and the great channels thro which all the metaphyſical jargon, and all the ſuperſtitious opinions of antient nations, have come down to us, intermingled with ſome ſcraps of good ſenſe and of true theiſm. PLUTARCH ſays there was nothing unreaſonable, fabulous, nor ſuperſtitious in the ſacred inſtitutions of the Egyptians, from whoſe ſchools we know that PYTHAGORAS and PLATO derived their theology. But on the contrary, he ſays, that all of them had moral and uſeful cauſes, and hiſtorical and philoſophical meanings. But the prieſt made his court, at the expence of truth, to the prieſteſs, to whom he addreſſed his treatiſe concerning ISIS and OSIRIS: and we ſhall do better to give credit, on this occaſion, to DIONYSIUS HALICARNASSENSIS *, who confeſſes, that altho many of the Greek fables ſhewed the operations of nature by allegories, and were compoſed for conſolation under the calamities of life, for taking away perturbations of mind, for removing falſe opinions, and for other very good and commendable purpoſes, yet they are to be condemned in general, many as impious, all as pernicious; and he praiſes ROMULUS for admitting none of them.

* Ant. Rom. L. 2.

SECT.

SECTION VII.

It may be worth while to give two inſtances of the extravagant hypotheſes which philoſophy and theology conſpired to frame, as ſoon, perhaps, as men began to turn their thoughts to theſe ſubjects; for we find ditheiſm and tritheiſm eſtabliſhed in the moſt early ages, concerning which we have any anecdotes.

They who believed a ſelf-exiſtent Being, the firſt intelligent cauſe of all things, muſt have believed this Being to be all-perfect. But then, as they modelled his government on an human plan, ſo they conceived his perfections, moral as well as phyſical, by human ideas; tho they did not preſume to limit the former by the latter. Thus, God was ſaid to be the firſt good; but then the general notion, or the abſtract idea, as ſome philoſophers would call it, of this good, was not only taken from human goodneſs, but was conſidered too with little or no other relation than to man, that excellent creature, the very image of his Maker, and one half of whom, at leaſt, was divine. A queſtion aroſe therefore on theſe hypotheſes. How could evil come into a ſyſtem, of which God was the author, and man the final cauſe? this queſtion made a further hypotheſis neceſſary. It was "dignus vindice nodus:" and another firſt God, another coeternal and coequal principle was introduced to ſolve it, a firſt cauſe of all evil, as the other was of all good. The conteſt between theſe independent and rival powers began by a ſtruggle, ſome have ſaid by a battle, when one of them endeavoured to reduce matter, which theſe philoſophers held to be a third principle, tho not a third God, into an orderly uniform frame and regular motion, and when the other endeavoured to maintain diſorder, deformity, irregularity,

larity, and to ſpoil, at leaſt, the great deſign. The ſame conteſt was ſuppoſed to continue in the government that commenced at the formation of the world, and phyſical or moral good and evil to be produced, as one or other of theſe gods prevailed.

PLUTARCH *, who was a zealous aſſertor of this doctrine himſelf, aſſerted it to have been likewiſe that of the magians, the Chaldeans, the Egyptians, and of every philoſopher almoſt of any note among the Greeks from PYTHAGORAS down to PLATO. He repreſents it as an opinion ſettled in the minds of men by the authority of legiſlators and divines, of philoſophers and poets, and not only as an opinion, but as an article of faith, on which ſacrifices and religious rites were eſtabliſhed. But every man has ſome favorite folly, and this was his. BAYLE himſelf is forced to confeſs, that the repreſentation is exaggerated. How indeed is it poſſible to believe that ſuch numbers of reaſonable men could concur, from age to age, in ſo great an abſurdity? Some of them might, and it is probable that they did, hold an opinion very near akin to this and derived from it, but not the ſame that PLUTARCH held, and the Marcionites and Manichaeans after him. This hypotheſis was mitigated by another; and inſtead of a god unproduced and ſelf-exiſtent, an inferior being, produced and dependent, was aſſumed to be the author of evil. The preceptor of TRAJAN could not help admitting, moſt inconſiſtently with himſelf, that the two principles were not of equal force, and that the good principle was prevalent: but even further that ZOROASTER, and by conſequence the magi, called the good principle alone God, and the evil principle a daemon. This mitigated hypotheſis was adopted by orthodox Chriſtians, as the other was by heretics, and has therefore ſupported itſelf longer than the other: tho the other ſpread more among Chriſtians, from the third century,

* Lib. de ISIDE et OSIRIDE.

and before MANES down to the ſeventh and even to the ninth, than it had ever ſpread and prevailed in the pagan world. But whatever ſucceſs theſe hypotheſes have had, when we conſider even that which I have called mitigated, as a pagan dogma, we muſt ſay, that altho it does not imply contradiction ſo manifeſtly as the other, yet it implies it as ſtrongly, and is ſtill more injurious to the Supreme Being. It implies it as ſtrongly; for to affirm that there are two ſelf-exiſtent gods, independent and coequal, who made and govern the world, is not a jot more abſurd, than it is to affirm that a God ſovereignly good, and at the ſame time almighty and alwiſe, ſuffers an inferior dependent being to deface his work in any ſort, and to make his other creatures both criminal and miſerable. It is ſtill more injurious to the Supreme Being; for if we had been to reaſon with pagan ditheiſts on their own notions, we might have inſiſted, that it is no diſgrace to a prince to reign according to the conſtitution of his country jointly with another, as the ephori reigned at Sparta, and the conſuls governed at Rome, and that the ill government of his partner reflects no diſhonor on him. But that to ſay of a monarch, in the true ſenſe of the word, who is inveſted with abſolute power, that he ſuffers one of his ſubjects to abuſe the reſt without controul, and to draw them into crimes and revolts, for which he puniſhes them afterwards, is the moſt injurious accuſation that can be brought. That heathen theiſts of common ſenſe reaſoned in this manner we cannot doubt, and that they did ſo I find a remarkable proof, tho a negative one, and brought for another purpoſe, in the intellectual ſyſtem. CELSUS objected to the Chriſtians that they believed a certain adverſary to God, the devil, called in hebrew Satan, and that they affirmed impiouſly that the greateſt God was diſabled from doing good, or withſtood in doing it, by this adverſary. Now CELSUS, who made this objection to the Chriſtians, would not have made it, I think, if he himſelf had

had held the mitigated ditheiſm we have mentioned, whether he held the other or no.

Let us ſpeak of tritheiſm, the other inſtance propoſed to ſhew how natural theology was rendered a confuſed heap of abſurd and inconſiſtent hypotheſes, by men who preſumed to dogmatize beyond the bounds of human knowledge.

Dr. Cudworth could not well conceive, no more than la Motthe le Vayer, how a trinity of divine hypoſtaſes ſhould be firſt diſcovered merely by human wit and reaſon. He would have it believed, therefore, a revelation to the Jews, and a tradition derived from them. But he ſupports his ſuggeſtion ill. That the Samothracians held a certain trinity of gods, which they called by an Hebrew name Cabbirim, or the mighty gods, and that there are in the books of the old Teſtament certain ſignifications of a plurality in the Deity, are allegations ſo vague and inconcluſive that they prove nothing, or might be turned to prove what the learned author would have diſliked very much, to prove it ill perhaps, but as well at leaſt as they prove his ſuggeſtion. The other proof he brings, may be equivocal as well as weak in the manner in which it is expreſſed. He quotes Proclus for ſaying that the trinity contained in the Chaldaic oracles was at firſt a theology of divine tradition, or a revelation, or a divine cabbala, and he quotes the Greek of Proclus, after which he adds, viz. amongſt the Hebrews firſt, and from them afterwards communicated to the Egyptians and other nations. If Proclus now had ſaid all this in terms, or had ſpoke to the effect of the additional words, which I am unable to determine, not having the book at this time in my power, the proof would have been no better than either of the former. But if the additional words are not of Proclus, but of the doctor, the doctor ſeeming to quote Pro-

CLUS quotes himſelf, in reſpect to the point he was concerned to ſecure, that this divine revelation could be made to no other nation, if it was made, than to the Hebrews.

I PROCEED now to ſay that it is not ſo hard to conceive how human wit and reaſon might, and why philoſophers did, invent the hypotheſis of a trinity, without any obligation to the Jews, who from their exode to their return from their ſeventy years captivity, and from thence till all their books were written or reduced into a canon, borrowed much more than they lent.

THE confuſion and obſcurity of the firſt philoſophy, as it was taught in the antiquity to which we look up in this diſcourſe, was in no part greater than in this of the trinity. They who have pretended to explain it, to improve it, and to build upon it, have only perplexed it the more: ſome becauſe they were as chimerical as the firſt inventors, and others becauſe they had ſome particular purpoſe to ſerve. What is unintelligible in PLATO, for inſtance, or in the fragments that we have of pythagorean doctrines, you will not perceive to grow more intelligible when you have conſulted JAMBLICUS, PORPHYRY, PLOTINUS, any of the philoſophers of theſe ſects, or any of the chriſtian fathers who ſanctified a great deal of this heathen lore. MARSILIUS FICINUS, and the whole crowd of modern tranſlators, commentators, and collectors, will help you as little. Even CUDWORTH, the beſt of them, leaves you where he found you, and gives you little elſe than a nonſenſical paraphraſe of nonſenſe. It was not his fault. The good man paſſed his life in the ſtudy of an unmeaning jargon: and as he learned, he taught.

IF

If he had not been fond of giving a divine original to a doctrine that became a fundamental article of chriſtianity, he might have deduced the original of this very human hypotheſis, for ſuch it was in the pagan world, from what he had aſſerted and proved already. He had ſhewn how poets and philoſophers promoted polytheiſm by allegorizing corporeal nature. Was it hard then to imagine, that they allegorized incorporeal nature likewiſe? they deified ſenſible, why ſhould they not deify intellectual, objects? They increaſed the number of their gods, by deifying even mixed modes and relations. Why ſhould they not do the ſame, by making ideal ſubſtances of the wiſdom and power of God, and of that divine ſpirit which they imagined to pervade all things? There was no need of inſpiration, nor any extraordinary communication, to prompt them to do ſo: and it would have been matter of wonder if the whole ſyſtem of nature had not been reduced, as it was, into one body of corrupt theology, by the Egyptians and the other nations of the Eaſt, and by the Greeks who philoſophiſed many centuries together on the ſame fooliſh principles.

The habitude of erecting extravagant hypotheſes into doctrines of the firſt philoſophy, and of founding natural theology on the moſt unnatural principles, might ſeduce men eaſily into tritheiſm, without any ſuch apparent reaſons for it as they had for ditheiſm. But if they thought themſelves obliged to invent the latter in order to account for the exiſtence of evil, they ſaw that there was a neceſſity for inventing the former, in order to give an appearance of conſiſtency to the very beſt of their theiſtical ſyſtems. They had gods and demi-gods and daemons enough. But none of them could be reputed firſt cauſes, or principles, and three ſuch at leaſt were neceſſary to be found.

When

When they had imagined a celeſtial, on the plan of a terreſtrial, monarchy, they found place and rank and buſineſs for all the imaginary beings that ſuperſtition had created: but they confined the monarch, like an eaſtern prince, to the inmoſt receſſes of his palace, where they ſuppoſed him to remain immoveable. They acknowledged him, very rationally, to be the ſource of all intelligence and wiſdom and power, as well as the fountain of all exiſtence, and the ſpring of all life and motion throout the whole extent of being. But then they imagined, very irrrationally, that this unity was ſuch an immoveable eſſence as could not have acted in the formation, and as did not act in the preſervation and government, of the world. They raiſed their notions of the divine majeſty ſo high, or, to ſpeak more properly, they refined ſo metaphyſically upon them, for they cannot be ever raiſed too high, when they are kept within the bounds of our real ideas, that they placed the Supreme God not only far out of the ſight of human intellect, but even out of the reach, if I may ſay ſo, of that ſyſtem whereof they confeſſed him to be the firſt cauſe. There were, indeed, according to them inferior generated gods participant in ſome ſort of his wiſdom, and delegates in ſome degree of his power; but this participation and this delegation were not ſufficient: and to make ſuch a ſyſtem as that of the univerſe, the very wiſdom and the very power of the ſupreme ſelf-exiſtent Being were neceſſary. No cauſe out of the Deity could produce ſuch effects, and all other beings with participated wiſdom and delegated power would be but ſecond cauſes at beſt, acting indeed, but acted upon, without any adequate efficacy of their own.

We may very well believe, that ſome ſuch conſiderations as theſe determined the moſt antient philoſophers to aſſume a trinity

trinity of divine hypoſtaſes in the Godhead. A ſecond proceeding eternally from the firſt, and a third proceeding eternally from the ſecond, or from the firſt and the ſecond. Subſiſtencies, beings not independent like the good and the evil god, but diſtinct. Subordinate, but ſubordinate within the Deity, and far above the higheſt order of generated gods. It is probable that neither ZOROASTER, nor the magi, nor MERCURY TRISMEGIST, nor the Egyptian divines, were as ingenious to abſtract and diſtinguiſh and to invent new words, as the Nicaean fathers, or the latter pythagoricians and platonicians. They might content themſelves with eſtabliſhing the general difference I have mentioned between theſe three, and all their other gods. CUDWORTH ſays, that they underſtood by this trinity the Godhead: and I remember to have read ſomewhere, in PLOTINUS perhaps, or in ſome other madman of that ſtamp, that there are emanations within the Deity as well as emanations that go out of it. The ſecond of theſe gods, then, was the divine intellect perſonified, an emanation that did not emane, if you allow the term, out of the Deity. The third was the divine Spirit, another emanation that did not emane neither. Thus the difficulties that embarraſſed theſe great divines, might ſeem to be taken away; for tho the immoveable eſſence of the unity could not move, nor act, nor pervade, and become the ſoul of the world immediately, yet all this might be done by the ſecond and third perſons of the Godhead, who exerted all the energy of the firſt.

THAT ſuch an hypotheſis was eſtabliſhed among the moſt antient of the heathen divines cannot be doubted, tho their doctrines are come to us in broken ſcraps very imperfectly, and therefore very darkly. This imperfect and general knowledge is enough however to ſatisfy any reaſonable curioſity, and it leaves room enough for great ſcholars to diſpute and wrangle about

about particulars. Let us leave that part to them, and purſue reflections of another kind.

Some, and I think very few, of the Greek philoſophers were rank atheiſts. Diagoras was one: and, if it be true that Democritus bought and inſtructed him, he might paſs eaſily from the abſurdity of believing that the viſible ſpecies of things and the ideas we receive from them are gods, to that of believing that there is no God. Theodorus was another: and he was ſo zealous in his atheiſm, that he wrote ſeveral books to maintain it. Strato was not quite ſo poſitive in the denial of any Supreme Being; but he was very poſitive, that he had no need of aſſuming any to account for the making of the world. He went thro all the parts of it, and pretended to ſhew, that all of them were effects of natural cauſes, of matter and motion. "Naturalibus fieri aut factum eſſe dicit ponde-"ribus et motibus," ſays Tully *. Epicurus acknowledged gods, but gods ſo extremely ridiculous, that he was guilty of ſomething worſe than atheiſm, whilſt he affected theiſm, "in-"vidiae deteſtandae cauſâ," ſays the ſame Tully.

Such philoſophers as theſe imagined a ſort of plaſtic nature working blindly but neceſſarily, and requiring no ſuperior principle to direct her action. The greateſt part of the antient naturaliſts thought very differently from theſe. They eſtabliſhed a material, and an efficient, intelligent cauſe of all the phaenomena. Tho all of them believed matter eternal, they had various opinions about the material cauſe. It was to ſome an aſſemblage of all the elements maſſed and confounded and fermenting together, "rudis indigeſtaque moles." To others it was ſome one ſelect element; to Thales water, or perhaps a fluid chaos; to Anaximenes air; to Archelaus air condenſ-

* Acad. Quaeſ. l. 4.

ed

ed into water, the principle of THALES; or rarified into aether, the fiery principle of the ſtoics. Their notions of the efficient intelligent cauſe were not more uniform than theſe: but as theſe were different manners of conceiving the ſame thing, ſo were the others. The material cauſe, under every notion of it, was matter ſtill; the efficient cauſe, under every notion of it, was intelligence ſtill: and all the notions of this kind, which theiſtical philoſophers entertained, were leſs repugnant, if I am not much deceived, than it is commonly thought. It ſeems to me, that the differences between them were more apparent than real, and that they aroſe chiefly from different applications of the ſame trinitarian hypotheſis. On this foundation, much of what has paſſed for atheiſm may be explained eaſily into theiſm. I could carry inſtances of my charity a great way up on this occaſion, to the ionic philoſophers, ANAXIMENES and ARCHELAUS for inſtance, if not to ANAXIMANDER: and if THALES, the founder of this ſchool, wants little, ANAXAGORAS, the laſt but one of his ſucceſſors, wants no excuſe to clear him of atheiſm.

THE hypotheſis of a trinity in the godhead was brought from Egypt into Greece by ORPHEUS, whoever he was, and poſſibly by others in that remote antiquity. It is not unlikely too, that this doctrine being taught to an half ſavage people, who were unable to diſtinguiſh between gods in the godhead and gods out of it, if in truth that diſtinction was made ſo early, increaſed and confirmed their polytheiſm. But the true philoſophical age having begun much later in that country, when the Greeks, inſtead of waiting for miſſionaries from Egypt, went thither themſelves in queſt of ſcience, this hypotheſis could be little known, and leſs employed before that æra; whereas it was much in uſe afterwards, and we find the traces of it in all that theiſtical philoſophers taught. Theſe traces are

obſcure and confuſed. The doctrine itſelf was ſo, till PLATO appeared like the pagan ATHANASIUS, defined the myſtery, and fixed a profeſſion of faith that laſted till the chriſtian ATHANASIUS altered it. Thus we may account, in part, for the obſcurity and confuſion wherein we diſcover the traces of this doctrine. It was very obſcure and confuſed in the minds of the philoſophers themſelves. No wonder then if the references to it, and the opinions derived from it, are ſtill more ſo in the writings of men who have conveyed them down to us in fragments, and who underſtood the doctrine even leſs than theſe philoſophers *. TULLY

* WE ſhall have no room to be ſurprized, that the pagan doctrine of a trinity in the godhead was taught, and has come down to us, ſo confuſedly; if we conſider, how confuſedly and how darkly the fathers of the three firſt centuries expreſſed themſelves on the ſame ſubject: tho the learned biſhop BULL would have made, if he could, theſe primitive fathers all "ad unum" Athanaſians, and the doctrine of the church to have been exactly that of the Nicaean council, long before ATHANASIUS was born, or the council was held. If this doctrine has come down to us with greater preciſion, than that of the heathen philoſophers, and in an uniformity of terms, the reaſon is obvious. Antient theiſts applied their unſettled notions of this kind differently, and according to their different ſyſtems of philoſophy. They were under no common controul, to enforce an uniformity of terms at leaſt: whereas among Chriſtians there was ſuch a controul, and men were obliged to uſe the ſame forms of words, whatever their opinions were. Their leaders indeed diſputed much, and each of them formed a party: but when they met in councils, they were obliged ſometimes by art or intrigue, and ſometimes by the determining influence of imperial authority to unite in terms, and to create an appearance of uniformity. Thus the chriſtian doctrine of the trinity was fixed. Different councils, it is true, made different deciſions, and reverend fathers, who had held one opinion in one council, changed it in another; there were therefore ſeveral orthodoxies "pro "tempore," if I may ſay ſo. But that which prevailed laſt has come down to us: and nothing has been neglected, not even interpolation, to make more antient fathers hold the language of thoſe who were more modern; an example of which I will quote from ERASMUS [a]. That learned, exact, and candid divine not only acknowledges in many places, among a multitude of other defects, ſuch as unfairneſs, uncharitableneſs, and violence, the inaccuracy of theſe fathers in their writings; but he complains likewiſe of the interpolations and alterations, which have been made in them for the purpoſe I have mentioned. St. HILARY, for inſtance, who ſpoke ſometimes of the ſon of God, as of a God of the ſame kind, or of the ſame nature with his father, which expreſſions however do not come up to a complete

[a] Ep. in HILARIUM.

notion

TULLY makes VELLEIUS ſay, that THALES was the firſt who inquired into ſuch matters; that he aſſerted water to be the

notion of conſubſtantiality, dared not call the holy ghoſt God, nor aſcribe adoration to him; either becauſe he is not called God expreſsly in ſcripture, or becauſe the ſaint thought it more neceſſary to inſiſt on the godhead of the ſon, whoſe human nature made it more difficult to perſuade mankind that he was God; or elſe, finally, becauſe the claim of the holy ghoſt had not been yet admitted in due form by councils, who erected themſelves, as it were, into courts of honor to ſettle ranks and precedency in heaven. ERASMUS thinks that ſuch reaſons as theſe obliged HILARIUS to uſe much caution in his expreſſions, and therefore, ſpeaking of the holy ghoſt, he had contented himſelf to ſay, "promerendus eſt:" but ſome orthodox interpolator added, "et adorandus." Many other inſtances of corrupting the text of this writer there are, and thoſe principally where ſuch liberties ought to have been taken the leaſt, as in his books "de trinitate," and "de ſynodis;" for in them, ſays ERASMUS, he treated very difficult and very dangerous points of divinity, "periculoſae de rebus divinis difficultates."

THE ſame artifice was employed ſometimes in favor of opinions reputed heterodox, if we may believe RUFINUS, who, in defending ORIGEN againſt that bully, JEROM, and that ideot, EPIPHANIUS, inſiſts that ORIGEN would not have been expoſed to their cenſure, if his writings had not been interpolated. But this artifice, as well as others, had a much greater, and an entire effect, when it was employed on the ſide of the orthodox, that is, of the majority, or of thoſe who made themſelves paſs for the majority. Thus it happened, in the caſe of the trinity, and in many others, that chriſtian doctrines have been handed down with an appearance of uniformity, which pagan doctrines could not have.

BUT farther, if chriſtian doctrines had come down in the writings of the moſt antient fathers, with ſtill leſs uniformity than they have, ſuch modern fathers as biſhop BULL, would not have found it hard to make them appear entirely uniform. This he has attempted, in the caſe of the trinity, with great applauſe from the eccleſiaſtics of your church, and from thoſe of ours. He owns, for inſtance, that ORIGEN talks ſometimes too freely and ſceptically; that TERTULLIAN cared little what he ſaid, provided he contradicted his adverſary; and that two eggs are not more alike, than the expreſſions of this father to the whimſies of VALENTINIAN. He gives us LACTANCTIUS for a rhetor ignorant in theology, and St. JEROM for a ſophiſt not to be relied on much. Many of their expreſſions being gnoſtical, and arian, as well as thoſe of other fathers; they were not much in his favor; and yet to ſave them for other purpoſes wherein their authority might be neceſſary, he diſtinguiſhes between witneſſes of the faith, and interpreters of the ſcriptures. He allows them to be good witneſſes, and condemns them often as bad interpreters. He makes this diſtinction particularly, when he ſpeaks of a paſſage in IRENAEUS, where this father cites a paſſage from the prophet ISAIAH, to prove the divinity of the holy ghoſt. BULL thought ORIGEN orthodox in his opinion, tho not in his expreſſions,

the firſt principle of things, and God the mind who framed them all

concerning the trinity. Few of the fathers, who lived before the Nicaean council, were ſo; and therefore BULL ſuppoſes them orthodox againſt their expreſſions, rather than proves them to have been ſo, by their expreſſions. He does by them, what they did by the ſcriptures, and draws them to his ſenſe, in what terms ſoever they ſignify their own. CUDWORTH thinks theſe primitive fathers heterodox in opinion, as well as in expreſſion. They muſt needs have been much in the wrong, ſince they agreed in aſſerting the ſubordination of the ſon to the father. They had taken this opinion of the logos from the platonic philoſophy, and their whole trinity was built on the plan which PLATO had made leſs confuſed than that of other heathen trinitarians. "Uſque ad tres hypo-"ſtaſes, dicit PLATO, Dei progredi eſſentiam; et eſſe quidem, dicit, Deum ſumme "bonum, poſt illum autem ſecundum conditorem, tertium autem mundi animam."

THE abſurdities and prophanations built on ſuch notions as theſe, were innumerable. He who endeavours to conſider them with attention, will find his head turn in the confuſion they create, and no preciſe diſcrimination of orthodox and heterodox poſſible to be made between them, either according to reaſon, wherein they have no foundation at all, or to goſpel revelation, wherein they have very little. They were however propagated by pagan and chriſtian theology, till metaphorical generations were thought to be real, and till the virtues and operations of the one Supreme Being, were aſſumed to be diſtinct hypoſtaſes or ſubſiſtences in the divinity; as the aeons of VALENTINIAN ſignified, I preſume, no more, in the allegorical cant of the firſt chriſtian times, than virtues and affections of the divinity, which were afterwards underſtood to be real beings exiſting out of the firſt Being.

THESE doctrines were encouraged, perhaps introduced by others, that traditional theology among the heathens, and cabaliſtical literature among the Jews, had preſerved from the moſt antient ages; and which, as wild as they were, had wanted neither knaves nor fools to vouch for them. Theſe were ſuch as ſuppoſed frequent manifeſtations of the Supreme Being to his creatures. According to theſe, he manifeſted himſelf ſometimes under the form of an angel; ſometimes a little, and but a little differently, under that of a man; both of which were called God whilſt the manifeſtation laſted. That this was ſo, we may conclude from divers paſſages of the old teſtament, and from ſeveral Egyptian traditions. Thus it became in time not hard to imagine a much more noble manifeſtation of the Supreme Being himſelf, in the appearance of the Logos or the Word, under an human form, into which God had inſinuated himſelf, and in which he remained incarnated. "Pater in me ma-"nens facit ipſe opera." The Word, that is the ſupreme reaſon, was always with God, for God alone is that ſupreme reaſon: but this reaſon ſpoke to mankind under the ſenſible image of a man, when that perſon appeared who was called the ſon of God on account of his miraculous birth, and moſt important miſſion. Such was the Word of St JOHN; "the viſible image of the inviſible God." To this let us add,

all out of water †. DIOGENES LAERTIUS ſays, that THALES held God to be the oldeſt of all the things that exiſt, becauſe ungenerated or unproduced; and the world to be the moſt beautiful, becauſe it was made by God §. Theſe expreſſions might induce one to think, that THALES was not only the oldeſt, but the moſt orthodox, of the Greek philoſophers, even more ſo than the divine PLATO; and that his doctrine may ſerve as an inſtance to confirm TERTULLIAN's maxim, how precarious ſoever it be, "id verum quod primum." They might induce one to think, that THALES intended the Supreme Being, whoſe ſole action in the production of things other theiſts did not acknowledge; tho they acknowledged his exiſtence. But theſe paſſages, compared with others, will rather ſerve to ſhew, in how confuſed a manner the trinitarian hypotheſis led theſe philoſophers to ſpeak of God, and of the firſt efficient cauſe. BAYLE thought the text of TULLY corrupted in the paſſage concerning THALES, becauſe VELLEIUS having ſaid, that this philoſopher was the firſt, ſays immediately after, that ANAXAGORAS ‖ was the firſt, who taught this doctrine. There may be room for ſuch a ſuſpicion, and whatever interpretation be given to the paſſage, it will be little agreable to the uſual clearneſs and preciſion of that great author.

add, for the honor of humanity, and on the authority of ſcripture, that angels ſuffered themſelves to be adored by men before this manifeſtation; but that they have declined this honor ever ſince the ſon of God took upon him the human nature.

† THALES, qui primus de talibus rebus quaeſivit, aquam dixit eſſe initium rerum: Deum autem eam mentem, quae ex aquâ cuncta fingeret. CIC. de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

§ Antiquiſſimum eorum omnium quae ſunt, Deus; ingenitus enim. Pulcherrimum mundus; à Deo enim factus eſt.

‖ ANAXAGORAS, qui accepit ab ANAXIMENE diſciplinam, primus omnium rerum deſcriptionem et modum mentis infinitae vi ac ratione deſignari, et confici voluit.

WHEN

When we conſider that Thales had been inſtructed in the Egyptian ſchools, and reflect on the opinion imputed to him by Stobaeus, that the firſt cauſe had no action, we muſt be perſuaded, that however he ſpoke of mind, he did not intend the firſt God in the heathen trinity. He ſeems rather to have confounded Nous and Pſyche, mind and ſoul, the ſecond and the third god. A paſſage in Diogenes Laertius is very favorable to this notion; for in that Thales is ſaid to have held, that mind, and therefore the efficient cauſe which had made all things out of water, was the ſwifteſt of things, and pervaded rapidly the univerſe *. None of theſe philoſophers preſumed to employ the firſt God, as the immediate active efficient cauſe of things. They introduced therefore into their phyſiological theology the ſecond and the third gods of the zoroaſtrian and orphic trinity, whom they ſometimes ſeem to diſtinguiſh, and whom they much oftener confound.

Pythagoras talked, it is ſaid, of an immaterial unity and a material duality, by which he pretended to ſignify perhaps the firſt principles of all things, the efficient and material cauſes: and yet we ſee how his doctrine is repreſented in the firſt book of the nature of the gods. He was underſtood to have taught, that God is a ſoul diffuſed thro all being, and from which all human ſouls were taken †. This was called "avulſionem aetheris immortalis et divini:" and Cicero remarks, or makes his interlocutor remark, that Pythagoras did not ſee how by this avulſion or diſtraction God himſelf was rent and torn, "diſcerpi ac dilacerari Deum §."

* Velociſſimum, mens; nam per univerſa diſcurrit.

† Pythagoras —— cenſuit animum eſſe per naturam rerum omnem intentum et commeantem, ex quo animi noſtri carperentur, &c.

§ Diog. Laer.

This

THIS pythagorean god was very like the aetherial god of the ſtoicians, and both of them ſignified, if my notions are right on this ſubject, which I do not preſume to affirm, tho I think them as probable as any others, the third divinity in the godhead, according to the trinitarian hypotheſis, which was certainly known to the Samian, and could not be unknown to the maſter of the portic. Theſe theiſtical naturaliſts imagined a ſort of plaſtic nature, as well as the atheiſtical naturaliſts; but inſtead of ſuch a one as acted blindly and neceſſarily, they aſſumed one that acted by deſign and choice, that is with intelligence. This mind or intelligent ſpirit, for they were often undiſtinguiſhed, being infuſed, as it were, into all the parts of the material world, and moving and directing the whole as the human mind or ſoul moves and directs the human body, they conceived, the ſtoics at leaſt conceived, the material world like a great animal endued with life, ſenſe, and intellect, according to the curious logic of ZENO, who advanced this paradox on the ſtrength of logic for want of any better foundation, and juſt as he advanced many, and might have advanced ten thouſand more. But ſtill we muſt not imagine, that air or water, or aether or fire, or the world itſelf was God in the opinion of theſe philoſophers. No, they were theiſts, and their god was the divine ſpirit that exerted the power and energy of the father of ſpirits; their god was the mind or ſoul of their trinity, or both together. They who looked up to the "ſublime candens" of ENNIUS invoked JUPITER, according to this poet, and who was JUPITER? not the aether, the "ſublime candens," but a being every where preſent and almighty, the father of gods and men, the lord of all things, and who governs them with his nod *.

As

* Aſpice hoc ſublime candens, quem invocant omnes jovem—patrem divumque

As extravagant as theſe doctrines may appear, you muſt not condemn them too raſhly. If ZENO lived in theſe days, he might juſtify what he taught about aether, and a divine ſpirit that acts in it and by it, by greater authorities than you apprehend perhaps. He might ſoon reconcile his opinions to thoſe of ſome chriſtian philoſophers, and ſhelter himſelf behind their orthodoxy. There are thoſe who aſcribe as much to this active, luminous, fiery aether as ZENO did: and ſince he thought it, or rather called it, God, becauſe of the divine ſpirit whoſe vehicle it was, they would ſoon perſuade him to admit that this divine is an incorporeal ſpirit, without whoſe immediate action upon aether, even aether itſelf would be incapable of producing any one of the phaenomena, and not the leaſt operation could be performed in the whole extent of phyſical nature. They would perſuade him to it the ſooner, becauſe by rejecting all exiſtence, beſides ſpirit and idea, and by making his doctrines coincide with theirs in the whole, he would deliver himſelf from a moſt abſurd inconſiſtency, or from the trouble of defending it. I find, in one of the fineſt letters of SENECA *, whoſe authority concerning the tenets of ZENO, the founder of the ſect he had embraced, is deciſive, that this philoſopher denied the exiſtence of a material world, and by conſequence, one would think, of his favorite aether. PARMENIDES aſſerted one ſole ſubſtance, like SPINOZA. ZENO denied even this, ſays SENECA †. He could not believe his God, therefore, to be ſo much as cloathed with aether, unleſs he contradicted himſelf: but by taking refuge among theſe philoſophers, he might talk as if he did; he might maintain that

que hominumque—dominatorem rerum, omnia nutu regentem—praeſentem ac praepotentem Deum. CIC. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

* Ep. 88.

† —— PARMENIDI, nihil eſt praeter unum—ZENONI ne unum quidem.

he

he was ſo cloathed, and might aſſume the right they aſſume, to talk moſt learnedly of all the corporeal phaenomena without believing that they exiſt; in ſhort, he might reduce inconſiſtency itſelf into ſyſtem. SENECA, and the whole portic, might cry out that too much ſubtilty does great hurt, and is injurious to truth *. They would cry out in vain.

HAVING obſerved how THALES, PYTHAGORAS, and ZENO, the founders of three famous ſects, reaſoned about the firſt principles of things, I come to ſpeak of ANAXAGORAS. Now this philoſopher, like the reſt, held matter to be eternal. But he differed from them in his notions concerning the efficient cauſe. He did not make a plaſtic intelligent nature of mind and ſpirit, confounded into one. He did not make the ſame of ſpirit alone, as he might have done, ſince this ſpirit being divine and even a third God, according to antient traditions, could want no intelligence. He did not mingle up both or either of theſe with matter, to conſtitute a ſoul of the world. He advanced a much more rational hypotheſis than any of thoſe who went before, or who came after him. DIOGENES LAERTIUS has preſerved the ſummary of it in his own words. He was the firſt, ſays this biographer, who added mind to matter, that is, he added it in a manner that neither THALES nor any of the Greek philoſophers had imagined before him; for he writes thus in the beginning of his work, all things were blended together, when mind came and put them into order †. "Acceſſit "mens." Mind then was no part of them, no plaſtic nature working in them. Mind, the firſt efficient cauſe, was diſtinct from them, and extrinſecal to them. I determine not, whether ANAXAGORAS meaned by mind the Supreme Being in his unity,

* Quantum mali faciat nimia ſubtilitas, et quàm infeſta veritati ſit. ib.

† Primus hic materiae mentem adjecit, in principio operis——ſic ſcribens, omnia ſimul erant, deinde acceſſit mens eaque compoſuit.

without any regard to the hypotheſis of a trinity, or whether he aſſumed diſtinctly the ſecond God of this trinity, whilſt others aſſumed the third only, or confounded the ſecond with the third in their notions of a firſt efficient cauſe. In all caſes he was a more reaſonable theiſt, and eſpecially if he aſcribed the production, order, and government of the univerſe to the one, whom others conſidered only as the firſt God; which I incline to think was his meaning.

But to what purpoſe do I comment on this paſſage, when the doctrine of Anaxagoras concerning a firſt efficient cauſe is ſo fully mentioned by Aristotle and Plutarch? The former of theſe was much more inclined to cenſure, than to approve the opinions of other philoſophers: and yet Anaxagoras extorted his approbation, on this occaſion at leaſt, how much ſoever their opinions might differ on others. He who taught that mind or intellect was the efficient cauſe of the world, and of all order in it, appeared like a man of good ſenſe, "quaſi ſobrius," in compariſon with the former naturaliſts, who were a ſet of vain bablers, "vana dicentes," ſay Aristotle *: and he adds, we know that this man was Anaxagoras. The ſame philoſopher, in another place †, lets us farther into this doctrine; for he ſays there, that according to it this mind, the firſt principle or efficient cauſe, was ſimple and unmixed, and that Anaxagoras aſcribed to it both knowledge and the beginning of motion §. Plutarch goes farther ‖, for he contraſts the doctrine of Anaxagoras, who held that matter was motionleſs till God gave it motion as well as order, with that of Plato, who held that matter was in a diſorderly motion, and that God did nothing more than direct

* Arist. metaph. l. 1. † Arist. de anima l. 1.

§ —— Simplicem, et non miſtam, et puram eſſe, ſinceramque dixit. Atque eidem principio hæc utraque tribuit, cognitionem—— et motum, dicens, univerſum mentem moviſſe.

‖ Plut. de placit. phil. l. 1. c. 7.

this

this motion ſo as to bring order out of confuſion. This is the ſubſtance of the paſſage: and ſurely the Ionic philoſopher came nearer to orthodoxy in this caſe than the divine PLATO, tho ſuch a platonic madman as poor DACIER may not ſcruple to aſſert, and to believe piouſly, that, according to PLATO, motion was imprinted on matter by the ſame ſpirit who created matter *.

IT was objected to ANAXAGORAS, by ARISTOTLE and by ſeveral chriſtian writers, that altho he acknowledged a ſupreme mind to be the efficient cauſe of all things, yet he had never recourſe to it when he could account for the phaenomena without it. That he uſed the divine intellect as a machine, to remove difficulties, otherwiſe inſuperable, out of the way †; but in every other caſe, he choſe rather to inſiſt on natural cauſes §, than to argue from the principles of ‖ mind and reaſon. All this now means no more, than that he neither mingled logic, like ARISTOTLE, nor theology, like PLATO, with his phyſics: and the objection is not only abſurd in itſelf, but ſo much the more ſo, becauſe the methods of inquiring into nature, implied in it and oppoſed to that of ANAXAGORAS, are infinitely abſurd. I acknowledge, might ANAXAGORAS ſay, a ſupreme mind that diſpoſed and ordered the whole frame of the univerſe, that gave it motion and ſet the great machine a going under the influence and direction of ſecond cauſes, which proceed and work effects according to the original impreſſions that divine wiſdom and power made uniformly on all matter, or differently on the different elements of it. Theſe original

* Il a été imprimé a la matiere par le même eſprit qui l'a creé. La doctrine de PLATON.

† —— Tanquam machinâ utitur intellectu, &c. ARIST.

§ —— Magis caetera omnia, quam intellectum, cauſam eorum quae fiunt ponit. ARIST.

‖ —— Ex mentis rationiſque regula—— EUSEB.

impreſſions, which proceed from the inconceivable energy of the firſt efficient cauſe, and this order of ſecond cauſes which proceeds from them, I call laws of nature. Knowledge of the firſt is wholly unattainable. I preſume therefore to ſpeak ſeldom of it, and always hypothetically. Knowledge of the ſecond may be attained in ſome degree by obſervation and experiment, and by no other means. By theſe we may riſe a little way from particular to general and more general cauſes, and within theſe bounds I confine my phyſical reſearches.

If Anaxagoras held this diſcourſe, whatever cavils might be made by atomic or other philoſophers to ſome of the terms he employed, we ſhould be obliged to confeſs that he talked very rationally. Logic came into mode after his time. But logic, to ſpeak like my lord Bacon, cannot reach the ſubtilty of nature, and by catching at what it cannot hold, ſerves rather to eſtabliſh and fix error, than to open the way to truth. I may ſay too, after men of the greateſt name in philoſophy, what it would become me ill to pronounce on my own authority, that Aristotle rendered himſelf as ridiculous by applying logic to natural philoſophy, as Des Cartes rendered himſelf eſtimable by the application of geometry to it. As to theology, they who abuſe it by mixing it with phyſics, any farther than Aanaxgoras did, degrade the Supreme Being in their ideas, and lead men back towards polytheiſm, or to ſomething very like it at leaſt. Which is the leſs pardonable, becauſe it is done wantonly, as it were, and without any apparent motive but impertinent curioſity, or as impertinent vanity. They are unable to conceive how body can act at all, and therefore they ſuppoſe the immediate preſence and action of an incorporeal agent in every operation of corporeal nature. But to what purpoſe? aether, it is ſaid, that pure inviſible active fire, permeates the hardeſt bodies, or gravitation or attraction

traction intercedes all body, even the " minima naturae." Is not this now to aſcend high enough in the ſeries of ſecond cauſes? Or if we cannot conceive how aether performs of itſelf, and without any concurrent cauſe, the operations, and produces the effects which chemiſts aſcribe to it, do we hope to diſcover how mind acts on aether, or concurrently with it? Will any man, who is in his ſenſes, expect to diſcover what thoſe original impreſſions are, or how they were given by the ſupreme mind, which determine aether in this manner, and make it the ſenſible cauſe of theſe effects? I think not. They who believe that the newtonian attraction is no original nor univerſal property of matter, will do extremely well to attempt the improvement of this ſyſtem, by diſcovering the phyſical or metaphyſical cauſe of it. They who believe it ſuch a property will inquire no farther, nor agitate their minds, nor beat their brains, to diſcover the cauſe, and in hope to determine how this property was impreſſed originally on matter. A leibnitzian who does not believe any ſuch original univerſal property, nor any thing more than a new phaenomenon to have been diſcovered, ſhould conſequentially attempt the improvement I have juſt mentioned. But I think he would rather attempt to demoliſh by logic, what has been erected on experiment, and geometry, without being able to ſubſtitute any thing ſo good in the room of it. He would require of the newtonian, to give him the ſufficient reaſon of ſuch a property in matter. He would retire from the viſible corporeal world to the intellectual world of ideas, and endeavour to make the inquiry, that he could carry on no farther in phyſics, end in metaphyſics. The newtonian, if he was wiſe, would refuſe to follow him, leſt the inquiry ſhould end after much labor of abſtract meditation as oddly as that of LEIBNITZ did, when he could find the ſufficient reaſon of extenſion in nothing better than non-extended ſubſtances, in thoſe ſimple beings his monades.

As

As it is unreaſonable to indulge the fooliſh deſire of knowing, or the impertinent deſire of appearing to know, beyond the reach and comprehenſion of our very limited faculties in all caſes, ſo it is particularly both prophane and injurious to true theiſm to aſſume the immediate preſence and action of the Supreme Being in all the operations of corporeal nature; however the aſſumption may be palliated by metaphyſical diſtinctions, and how innocent ſoever the intentions of thoſe who make it may be. They who do this, do in effect reduce God in their ideas, notwithſtanding all the magnificent expreſſions which they employ, to be a ſort of plaſtic intelligent nature, working conſtantly on matter, if not in it. The notion is much the ſame with that which the pagans entertained. It is only leſs reverential to the Supreme Being than theirs was. They gave this employment to a third God, who was in that hypotheſis the ſecond link in that chain of being that reached down from God to man. Theſe chriſtian philoſophers and divines give it to the Supreme Being himſelf; for they profeſs that they adore this Being in his unity, and have no other God but him. We are forced to help our conceptions of the divine nature by images taken from human nature, and the imperfections of this nature are our excuſe. But then we muſt take care not to make humanity the meaſure of divinity, and much more not to make the laſt the leaſt of the two. When we have raiſed our idea of any human excellency as high as we are able, it remains a very limited idea. When we apply it to God, we muſt add to it therefore our negative idea, or our notion of infinity; that is, we muſt not confine it by the ſame, nor ſuppoſe it confined by any limitations whatever. Thus when we ſpeak of the world the work of God, we muſt not conceive it to have been made by a laborious progreſſion, and to have remained at laſt imperfect like the works of men.

We

We muſt conceive on the contrary, as well as we can, that God willed it to exiſt, and it exiſted; that he wills it to continue, and it continues diſtinct from the workman, like any human work, and infinitely better fitted by the contrivance and diſpoſition of it to anſwer all the purpoſes of the divine architect, without his immediate and continual interpoſition. To think otherwiſe is to meaſure divinity by a more ſcanty meaſure than humanity, and, becauſe we cannot conceive how the operations of this vaſt machine are performed, to account for them by ſuppoſing it, in this inſtance, leſs perfect than a machine of human execution. Carry a clock to the wild inhabitants of the cape of Good Hope. They will ſoon be convinced that intelligence made it, and none but the moſt ſtupid will imagine that this intelligence is in the hand that they ſee move, and in the wheels that they ſee turn. Thoſe among them, who pretend to greater ſagacity than the reſt, may perhaps ſuſpect that the workman is concealed in the clock, and there conducts inviſibly all the motions of it. The firſt of theſe hottentot philoſophers are, you ſee, more rational than atheiſts; the ſecond are more ſo than the heathen naturaliſts, and the third are juſt at a pitch with ſome modern metaphyſicians.

THE ſame objection was puſhed by PLATO againſt ANAXAGORAS on this farther conſideration, that, by inſiſting on ſecond cauſes alone, he neglected the contemplation of final cauſes and to "penetrate the deſigns of that Supreme Spirit who governs the "world; whilſt SOCRATES undertook to explain all nature by "the fitneſſes and unfitneſſes of things, and rather to give men "great views, and to elevate their minds, than to inſtruct "them in natural philoſophy *." I have touched this ſubject, I believe, already in part, and enough to ſhew, after my lord BACON, that the method ANAXAGORAS took, and our modern

* DACIER on the doctrine of PLATO.

phi-

philoſophers have purſued with ſo much honor to themſelves, and ſo much benefit to mankind, tended to the advancement of real knowledge; whereas the contrary method tended to obſtruct, and did really obſtruct it. But in this place, and without repeating what has been ſaid before, I muſt examine the objection in another view, and ſhew by a compariſon of the two methods, that SOCRATES and PLATO, who were in all things the ſame, as PLUTARCH ſays *, ſubſtituted fantaſtic in lieu of real knowledge, and corrupted ſcience to the very ſource; that of the firſt philoſophy in a particular manner, and by ſuch aſſumptions, and ſuch a method of reaſoning as continue the taint to this day.

THEY diſcovered a firſt intelligent cauſe, as ANAXAGORAS had done, "à poſteriori," that is, by the only true way by which we are able to make this diſcovery. The reflections which SOCRATES made on the creatures, as we learn from XENOPHON †, demonſtrated to him that the Creator of the world was not chance. It might have been expected from the character of SOCRATES, that he would have confined his ſpeculations to the ſame principle of reaſoning, or have controuled them by it. But he did the contrary. XENOPHON, who took minutes of his diſcourſes, accuſed PLATO of corrupting the doctrine of their common maſter, and DIOGENES LAERTIUS ſays, that PLATO aſcribed to him many things which he never taught. This writer quotes for it even the authority of SOCRATES himſelf; for he relates, that when this philoſopher heard the lyſis read, he cried out "oh HERCULES! how many "things does this young man feign of me?" But notwithſtanding theſe teſtimonies, and without entering into the quarrel between XENOPHON and PLATO, like GELLIUS, ATHENAEUS, and others, it would be eaſy to prove by ſeveral authorities, and even by

* De placit. phil. † De memorab.

that

that of XENOPHON, that if SOCRATES did not ſay all that PLATO made him ſay, yet he advanced many points of doctrine much more improper to be ſubjects of inquiry, than many which he forbid to be made ſuch. In ſhort, tho he is ſaid to have drawn philoſophy from the clouds, and tho he did in fact prefer the ſtudy of morality to that of phyſics, yet he mounted to the clouds himſelf, and loſt himſelf in them. How could he do otherwiſe? when he declared that the two offices of philoſophy are the contemplation of God, and the abſtraction of the ſoul from corporeal ſenſe *. Men, who are preſumptuous and mad enough to think themſelves capable of ſuch contemplation and ſuch abſtraction, may well begin their inquiries out of the bounds of human knowledge: and they who do ſo, run a great riſque of getting never into them. Such were theſe famous philoſophers: and that you may the better comprehend their method, I chooſe to ſet it before you in the light in which it ſtands in the Phaedo. You will ſee it there, and perhaps it is the only thing worth obſerving in the whole dialogue, with this advantage, that the method of reaſoning "à priori" is contraſted with that of reaſoning "à poſteriori."

IN the account which PHAEDO gives of the diſcourſe SOCRATES held immediately before his death, concerning the immortality of the ſoul, two objections that were made to him are mentioned. It was objected that the ſoul, being nothing more than a kind of harmony reſulting from the compoſition of the body, inſtead of laſting longer than the body, muſt decay with it, and even periſh before it. In the next place, the ſoul having been compared to a taylor, who makes himſelf ſeveral ſuits of cloaths, and wears them out one after another, the objector urges, that ſhe may wear out herſelf at laſt by the fatigue of

* STANLEY from PLATO.

going thro ſo many generations, and periſh with one body, tho ſhe has out lived many. Such weighty objections threw the auditors, who had been convinced before by the no leſs weighty arguments of SOCRATES, into doubt and perplexity. SOCRATES felt none, as you will believe of courſe: and PHAEDO proceeds to relate how he continued the diſputation, how he convinced CEBES one of the objectors, and how he left SIMONIAS the other without a reply. In order to do this the more effectually, he thinks it neceſſary to conſider the cauſes of generation and corruption: and he ſays on that occaſion, that he had been deſirous in his youth to ſtudy phyſics, or the hiſtory of nature, as he calls this ſcience. Now the more he ſtudied nature, that he might diſcover the cauſe of generation and corruption, and the conſtitution of human bodies, the more blind and the more ignorant, it ſeems, he grew: and this we ſhall believe the more eaſily ſtill, if we conſider how ſuperficially his ſcholar talks, and how groſsly he blunders too, whenever he touches theſe ſubjects, which he affects to treat as matters of amuſement rather than of ſerious application. SOCRATES became acquainted with ſecond cauſes and effects in the courſe of this ſtudy; but he could go no higher, and he remained much diſſatisfied with ſuch imperfect knowledge. He was therefore extremely rejoiced when he fell by accident on the works of ANAXAGORAS; for that philoſopher teaching that mind or intelligence had diſpoſed and ordered and was the cauſe of all things, he expected to find in thoſe writings the ſufficient reaſon of LEIBNITZ, not only how but why this mind or intelligence had diſpoſed and ordered every thing, why every thing is as it is thro the whole extent of nature. But he was again wonderfully diſappointed. ANAXAGORAS proceeded on obſervation and experiment, ſuch as he was able to make, to conſider how ſecond cauſes work in the corporeal ſyſtem, and the production of the phaenomena, under the direction, and by the energy of the firſt. But

he

he preſumed not to go up to the firſt, to diſcover how this direction was given, how this energy was communicated, nor, in a word, what the deſigns, the reaſons, and the ends of the divine architect were. SOCRATES therefore, who aimed at nothing leſs than knowledge of this kind, deſpiſed ANAXAGORAS, and conſidering what he had a mind to know, without any regard to the means he had of knowing, he deſpiſed phyſics and reſorted to metaphyſics. There he and his ſcholar found the immaterial forms of things, eternal ideas and incorporeal ſubſtances; by which if you ſhould aſk me what I underſtand him to have meant, I ſhould be obliged in conſcience to anſwer you as honeſt CEBES anſwered SOCRATES, "per Jovem haud "multum." Whatever they are, they exiſt in the divine intellect. There we may, and there we ought to contemplate them; for the Logos or ſecond God in the platonic trinity was an aſſemblage, a congeries, as CUDWORTH calls him, of beings crowded into one, the place of ideas in the platoniſm of MALBRANCHE, and the ſame thing to the ſoul, as the ſoul is to the body; for ſo we muſt underſtand an expoſitor and tranſlator of PLATO, or deny him any meaning at all *.

IF you would know how SOCRATES purſues his ſublime metaphyſical method of inveſtigating nature, you may pleaſe to imagine ANAXAGORAS and him in your garden, and yourſelf ſauntering between them. You admire the beauty and ſmell of one of your flowers, and you aſk the philoſophers what makes it ſo fine and ſo ſweet? The firſt talks to you of the figure of the flower, of the variety of colours which ſet off one another, and the ſeveral tints which run into one another and beget a pleaſing confuſion. He talks to you of the different ſtrainers thro which the ſap is filtered, and of the great alterations that he has obſerved to be wrought to the taſte as well as to the

* DACIER Arg. du PHAEDON.

ſight and ſmell in fruits as well as flowers by this operation of nature. But he owns very frankly, that his knowledge extends no further, and that he cannot ſo much as gueſs at the inward conſtitutions, and the real eſſences of ſubſtances. Socrates aſks Anaxagoras whether his ſenſes do not deceive him, when they give him ideas that are not full nor true repreſentations of the outward objects? Whether he does not perceive, that ſenſible objects are always in a flux, and never exiſt; whereas intellectual objects are permanent, and exiſt always? Whether he can pretend therefore to have any thing more than opinion about the former, and whether the latter alone are not objects of knowledge? Whether the intellectual contemplation of theſe is not diſturbed by the impreſſions of the other, and whether we are not kept from knowledge by taking opinion for it? Such queſtions as theſe, and many more, we may ſuppoſe, that Socrates would aſk according to his uſual ſtyle, in reply to the Ionic philoſopher; after which he would bid you ſhut your eyes and ſtop your noſe, if you are curious to know why the flower is fine and ſweet. He would bid you raiſe your thoughts by intenſe meditation, and an abſtraction from all particulars, up to the immaterial forms, the firſt fine and the firſt ſweet. It is by them, he would ſay, that this flower becomes fine and ſweet, juſt as a thing is big by bigneſs, or little by littleneſs, juſt as one is one by the participation of unity, and two are two by the participation of duality.

If, in the courſe of your converſation, it ſhould turn on moral ſubjects, the ſame method of reaſoning would be applied even to them. Should you aſk Anaxagoras what goodneſs is, or juſtice? He might bid you perhaps turn your eyes inward firſt, then ſurvey mankind, obſerve the wants of individuals, the benefits of ſociety, and from theſe particulars frame the general notions

ons of goodneſs and juſtice. He might go a ſtep further, and add, this is human goodneſs and human juſtice, ſuch as we can comprehend, ſuch as we can exerciſe, and ſuch as the ſupreme mind has made it both our duty and our intereſt to exerciſe, by the conſtitution of the human ſyſtem, and by the relations which ariſe in it; from all which our notions of goodneſs and juſtice reſult, and are compounded. Of divine goodneſs and divine juſtice, might this philoſopher conclude, I am unable to frame any adequate notions, and inſtead of conceiving ſuch diſtinct moral attributes in the Supreme Being, we ought perhaps to conceive nothing more than this, that there are various applications of one eternal reaſon, which it becomes us little to annalyſe into attributes.

The language of Socrates would be very oppoſite to this. He would bid you turn your eyes from the moral, as well as the phyſical world to the intellectual, nor aim at knowledge where it is not to be had, but ſeek it where it is alone to be had. He would bid you diſengage your ſoul from the incumberment of your body by purification and intenſe meditation, riſe from ſenſe to pure intellect, and, deſpiſing the low drudgery that the acquiſition of particular opinions requires, aſpire to nothing leſs than general knowledge, a knowledge of the immaterial forms of things, which are antecedent to actual exiſtence, a knowledge which may be obtained in part now, and which will be complete hereafter. He would proceed and inſiſt, for this is the expreſs doctrine of the Phaedo, that when you have once mounted up to theſe eternal, independent, and unalterable ideas, you ſhould make them the foundations or firſt principles of all your reaſoning, and receive as true, or reject as falſe, whatever you obſerve to be agreeable, or repugnant to them. Thus you would become able to imitate God in the exerciſe of goodneſs, juſtice, and every other moral virtue; ſince

ſince his and your ideas of theſe virtues would be taken from the ſame originals: and SOCRATES might the better conjure you, as he conjured his auditors in the priſon, to make yourſelf as like as poſſible to your great exemplar, the Supreme Being.

I THINK you are not extremely converſant in the works of PLATO: and you may ſuſpect therefore that I aggravate the impertinence of his doctrines. But the truth is, that as I have made ANAXAGORAS ſay nothing more than what he would, or might have ſaid, conformably to his manner of philoſophiſing; ſo I have made SOCRATES advance nothing which the Phaedo in particular, as well as PLATO's writings in general, will not vouch. But ſince I have brought this rambling eſſay down to the founder of the academy, it is neceſſary that ſomething more ſhould be ſaid about him and his philoſophy; for his appearance, and the inſtitution of his ſchool make a moſt remarkable epocha in the hiſtory of the firſt philoſophy. So remarkable, and ſo neceſſary to be well ſurveyed, that we cannot otherwiſe diſcern the true origin of the firſt philoſophy, and the theology which prevails at this hour in our own country, and among all the nations of the Weſt.

SECTION VIII.

SIGNS, ſymbols, ſacerdotal letters, ſacred dialects, and hieroglyphics were employed by the egyptian and eaſtern nations, to preſerve and to perpetuate their knowledge. Strange means indeed! For how imperfectly, how darkly, how uncertainly muſt this knowledge have been conveyed both to and from the greek philoſophers? What preciſion or clearneſs can we imagine, for inſtance, that DEMOCRITUS could find in thoſe ethics

ethics which he is ſaid to have tranſcribed from the columns of ACICARUS in Babylonia? Theſe monuments of egyptian and eaſtern philoſophy were explained, it may be ſaid, to DEMOCRITUS and to the other Greeks, who went into thoſe countries for inſtruction in every part of ſcience, by the brachmans, the magi, the gymnoſophiſts, and the egyptian prieſts, into whoſe colleges they were admitted, and into whoſe rites they were initiated. I believe that this was ſo. I believe that the egyptian and eaſtern maſters explained and commented the hieroglyphical or ſacerdotal text to their grecian ſcholars, and I believe further, that the ſcholars ſet up for maſters ſoon. The philoſophy they had learned, marvellous and myſtic, ſuited their genius extremely, and was particularly adapted to their humour, in ages when every man who had pretenſions of this kind affected to inſtitute a new ſect, or to diſtinguiſh himſelf at leaſt by ſome new hypotheſis. But what was the effect of all this. Did they become more intelligible than their maſters, or was their knowledge more real? We have in our hands the book JAMBLICUS wrote in anſwer to the queſtions which PORPHYRY had aſked. JAMBLICUS wrote long after the times we ſpeak of here; but his ſum of theology and theurgic knowledge was extracted from aſſyrian and chaldaean memorials, from the columns of the firſt MERCURY, and from books that contained all the doctrines of the antients, concerning matters of a divine nature, which were probably the books of the ſecond MERCURY, or ſuch as went under his name. In ſhort, from the ſame ſources, from whence the Greeks had ſo many centuries before derived their knowledge real and pretended. Was it grown more clear? Was it not in JAMBLICUS, and in all the greek philoſophers, who mingled up their own conceits with thoſe of their egyptian and eaſtern maſters as unintelligible in jargon, as the original of it all could be in hieroglyphics or ſacerdotal letters.

SUCH

SUCH we may conclude was the firſt philoſophy among the Greeks, from the beginning of their philoſophical aera, which we date no higher than PHERECYDES of Syros and THALES, dark in its original, and rendered more dark and more confuſed by men who grafted inceſſantly one degree of fantaſtical knowledge on another, and who for want of any criterion to fix their opinions, wandered into every hypotheſis which their warm imaginations, overheated by thoſe of Egypt and the Eaſt, could ſuggeſt to them.

IN the midſt of this darkneſs and confuſion, PLATO aroſe, about two centuries after the commencement that has been ſet of the philoſophical aera. If he diſpelled any of this darkneſs, it was by introducing a falſe light into the firſt philoſophy, that led men oftener out of the way of truth than into it: and as to the confuſion, which vague notions and ſyſtems of mere imagination neceſſarily produce, there was never any greater than that which aroſe in metaphyſics and theology, after platoniſm began to be dogmatically taught in the ſchool of Alexandria, and in thoſe of chriſtianity.

THIS philoſopher availed himſelf of all the fantaſtical ſcience that was then in vogue. He went into Egypt, he heard CRATYLUS, a ſcholar of HERACLITUS. He had a philoſophical correſpondence with ARCHYTAS: and, that he might improve himſelf the more in pythagorean doctrines, he went into Italy and converſed with the principal men of that broken ſect. He was a follower and a ſcholar of SOCRATES from his youth. Neither SOCRATES nor he had any great claim to the honor of being firſt inventors or teachers in any part of ſcience. That the maſter reduced ſpeculation to action we cannot doubt: and TULLY in his academical queſtions deſcribes him pompouſly

pouſly as the firſt who called philoſophy off from objects which are placed by nature beyond our reach, and which had employed all the philoſophers before him, to the buſineſs and duty of common life, and to the conſideration of virtue and vice, of good and evil. But public and private morality, and all the rules of good government, to ſay it by the way, had been taught long before SOCRATES, by SOLON and the other ſages of Greece: and if we compare the ſucceſs of his miſſion at Athens with that of PYTHAGORAS at Crotona, as it is repreſented by JUSTIN *, we ſhall find no reaſon to think him either the firſt or the greateſt miſſionary of natural religion. Sure it is, that he devoted himſelf to this work with much ſincerity, perſeverance and zeal, and was the martyr of a much purer doctrine than many a modern miſſionary has died for teaching. All we are to underſtand, therefore, by what is mentioned above, ſeems to be this, that he confined his leſſons of philoſophy to ethics: and even this cannot be true, if his leſſons were ſuch as PLATO repreſents them. I cannot help thinking, that TULLY was more attached to SOCRATES on account of his academical, than his moral character.

THERE was a greater ſimplicity, no doubt, in his manner of teaching than in that of PLATO, and in the doctrines too, very probably, that he taught. When queſtions were aſked him about another world, he anſwered with much ſimplicity, that he had never been there, nor had ever ſeen any one who came from thence. PLATO pretended to know more of the matter, and to have his knowledge from one who had been there, and whom the infernal judges had ſent to reveal what he had ſeen and heard. This idle tale was taken probably from the magi or the Chaldaeans, if this ERUS ARMENIUS,

* Lib. 20.

mentioned in the tenth book of his politics, was one of the ZOROASTERS: and as idle as it is, it got into hiſtory *, and has been recorded gravely, among other ſtories of extraordinary events. But tho the doctrines, as well as the manners of SOCRATES, were more ſimple than thoſe of PLATO; yet we know from PLUTARCH, and even by the diſcourſes which XENOPHON as well as PLATO aſcribes to him, that he entertained and propagated many of thoſe theological and metaphyſical notions, which are not, moſt certainly, parts of natural theology; becauſe they cannot be neceſſarily deduced from any knowledge that we have of nature.

METAPHYSICS may be ſaid to have ſucceeded mythology and phyſics in Greece about this time, tho the name was not invented till long after. PHERECYDES, PYTHAGORAS, and PARMENIDES made ſtrong pretenſions to a ſcience of this ſort. But the firſt and the laſt founded no ſect; and that of the other was ſoon diſperſed and extinguiſhed: tho DIOGENES LAERTIUS ſays, by miſtake doubtleſs, that it continued eighteen generations. The writings of theſe philoſophers being ſoon loſt, nor any ſet of men remaining long to preſerve a body of their doctrines, PLATO and ARISTOTLE had an opportunity of decking themſelves in their plumes, and of coming down to poſterity as originals on this and other ſubjects, on which they were far from being ſuch.

THE fables and the ſuperſtitious notions that prevailed among the vulgar of all ranks, in the days of polytheiſm, about their gods, became ſoon too groſs to ſatisfy thoſe who began in every country to emerge out of ignorance, and to cultivate and improve their reaſon. In vain did the philoſophers and

* VAL. MAX. l. 1. MACROB. ſomn. SCIP.

prieſts

prieſts endeavour to ſoften them to ſuch men as theſe, by all the myſtery of their myſteries, into which SOCRATES would never ſubmit to be initiated, that is, by their ſecret doctrine. Not only the unity of the Supreme Being, but the abſurdity of ſuppoſing him to exiſt a ſyſtem of matter like other material beings, was diſcovered, and the notion of a ſpiritual ſubſtance was eſtabliſhed. Whether this notion was entertained firſt of the Supreme Being, and was applied afterwards to the human ſoul; whether it was entertained firſt of the human ſoul, and was applied afterwards to the Supreme Being; or whether the idea of ſpirit and ſpiritual ſubſtance was determined exactly either by antient philoſophers, or by chriſtian fathers, as we have determined ours, if even ours is as much determined as we ſuppoſe it to be, I ſhall not inquire at this time. All I mean to obſerve is, that an intellectual world of ſubordinate and of created gods, of daemons, of ſouls, and other ſpiritual inhabitants, being once aſſumed, as it was together with the unity of God, if that which is demonſtrated may be ſaid in any ſenſe or on any occaſion to be aſſumed, the philoſophers did much the ſame thing in a metaphyſical, as they and the prieſts had done in a mythological way. They made as many ſpiritual beings as they wanted, and they generated them as they could. The head of JUPITER opened, and PALLAS the goddeſs of wiſdom came out of it, according to the mythologiſts. This image was too groſs, and the fable too impertinent to be retained. PLATO therefore refined metaphyſically upon it, and ſuppoſed, for in him it was mere ſuppoſition, a ſecond god, the logos, the word, the wiſdom of the firſt, an emanation proceeding from the firſt. When this metaphyſical generation by emanation was once eſtabliſhed in opinion, metaphyſics peopled heaven as faſt as ever phyſics, by the help of mythology, had done: and it is impoſſible to conſider without aſtoniſhment, how theſe ſpiritual beings were multiplied from age to age, by pythagorician

and platonic philoſophers, by jewiſh cabbaliſts, and by chriſtian divines both orthodox and heretical. A new jargon grew up to expreſs theſe chimerical notions, and very often to expreſs things of which the learned in thoſe days, as in ours, had not themſelves any notion at all. Expanſions and diffuſions of the moſt excellent nature, which PYTHAGORAS had learned from the zoroaſtrian theology to be a pure and perfect light, and which ſome of the greek philoſophers called an intelligent fire, proceſſions, profuſions, and extenſions of the firſt ſimple ſubſtance, ſuperior lights in the world of emanations, called ſephiroth by the Jews, aeons male and female, ſuperſubſtantial and ſubſtantial beings, numbers, ideas, words, forms, ſouls that inhabit in heaven and in the ſtars, all theſe terms were uſed, I ſay, till they paſſed for terms of a real ſcience. Thus metaphyſics conſtituted a ſort of polytheiſm, as mythology had done before: and to ſhew you how little advantage theſe refined doctrines had over the other, I will bring an inſtance which I find in Mr. SELDEN, and which is plainly an ingraftment on the metaphyſical doctrines of PYTHAGORAS and PLATO; tho it be of a later date, as it muſt needs be, ſince it is taken from the Jews who had moſt probably no knowledge of chaldaic philoſophy till they went into captivity, nor of greek philoſophy till after the expedition of ALEXANDER. Nothing appeared more ſhocking in all the pagan mythology, than the carnal copulations of gods and goddeſſes with one another and with mortals, than their adulteries and their rapes, than gods begetting children and goddeſſes lying in: and yet we may ſee by a paſſage of PLUTARCH, in the life of NUMA POMPILIUS, that theſe opinions were not only entertained by the vulgar, but were matters of grave ſpeculation and of theological diſpute, as much as the incarnation of the Word has been among Chriſtians: for he ſays that the egyptian doctors made this diſtinction; they held that a god might get a woman with child, but

but that a man could have no carnal commerce with a goddeſs. Now theſe copulations were carried on between ſouls in the ſpiritual world, according to the cabbaliſts, thoſe famous interpreters of jewiſh theology, tho in a more decent manner, and in lawful marriage, as we learn from SELDEN *. "The cabbaliſts, he ſays, aſſert, that as a ſoul deſcends from "heaven into the embryo of every man, ſo a new ſoul is ſent "from above into every proſelyte of juſtice; that which he "had whilſt he was a pagan either vaniſhing or returning." This new demand of ſouls, you ſee, required a new ſupply: and theſe ingenious metaphyſicians ſoon found one that was more than ſufficient. They imagined four palaces in heaven, where the ſouls of innumerable holy women are married to the ſouls of holy men; "and, they add, that as in marriages "here on earth, bodies copulate with bodies, ſo, in thoſe ce-"leſtial marriages, ſouls copulate with ſouls, light with "light †." Would not this ſample of cabbaliſtical knowledge make any learned divine grieve, that the ſeventy books of this kind, which ESDRAS had collected for the uſe of wiſe men, are loſt?

METAPHYSICS not only ſucceeded phyſics and mythology in the manner here obſerved, and became as great a fund of ſuperſtition, but they were carried ſtill farther, and corrupted all real knowledge, as well as retarded the progreſs of it. Metaphyſicians have not been quite agreed about the nature and object of their ſuppoſed ſcience. Thoſe we have laſt mentioned may be called and diſtinguiſhed by the title, if they like it, of pneumatic philoſophers, ſince their object is ſpirit and

* De jure nat. et gen. juxta diſcip. Ebraeor. l. 2. c. 4.

† Addunt ut in conjugiis hujus mundi, ſeu terreſtribus, corpora corporibus conjunguntur, ita in alterius illius, ſeu coeleſtibus conjugiis, eſſe conjunctionem animarum cum animabus, luminis cum lumine.

ſpi-

ſpiritual ſubſtances; how ridiculous ſoever it be to imagine ſpirit leſs an object of natural philoſophy than body. Thoſe we are about to mention may be decorated with a greek name likewiſe, and be called ontologiſts or ontoſophiſts; ſince their object is, being in the abſtract, "ens quatenus ens." But the name that ſuits beſt all the parts of metaphyſics, is that of the praeternatural ſcience; becauſe it is ſynonymous to chimerical ſcience. Who, indeed, but the author of nature, can ſee and know to the utmoſt extent of it? And who that is not delirious, therefore, can preſume to ſee and know beyond it? What principles can be laid, or how can any be laid, of a ſcience that is ſuppoſed to be a firſt and univerſal ſcience, and to contain the principles of all others, which are to be deduced from it? One might think that nothing can ſhew ſo marvelouſly the wanderings of the human mind, and the prevalence of imagination over all the rational faculties, as this inveterate habit of dogmatiſing about ſpirit and ſpiritual ſubſtances, and even about God, the Father of ſpirits. But there is ſomething ſtill more abſurd in the other part of metaphyſics. In this, the foundations are laid in knowledge. Foundations narrow, and in no degree proportionable to the hypotheſes raiſed upon them; but knowledge ſo real that it is intuitive, the knowledge that they have of their own ſpirits, minds, or ſouls, in a word of their own intellectual powers. In the other, the foundations are laid in a ſuppoſition which we know, or may know, intuitively to be falſe; for we may be as certain that the human mind cannot make the abſtractions theſe philoſophers pretend to make, as we are certain that we can walk or run but cannot fly: and yet this whole branch of philoſophy is built on the ſuppoſition that the human mind can and does make them. Such were the numbers of PYTHAGORAS, if we know what they were: ſuch were the ideas of PLATO, and ſuch is that fantaſtic ſcience which perverts the whole order of

of real ſcience, by pretending to deſcend from ſcientifical and axiomatical down to particular knowledge, and from univerſals to ſingulars, inſtead of attempting conformably to nature and reaſon the very reverſe of this.

THE ſuppoſed abſtract ideas, whether ſimple or complex, were wrought up, by warm imaginations, into eternal eſſences, incorporeal ſubſtances, independent and divine beings that reſided in or with the ſupreme intellect, and this may be properly called the firſt apotheoſis of folly *; for the ſame men ſoon imagined a ſecond. The ſecond was that of the human mind or ſoul. The human mind or ſoul was of divine original, according to PYTHAGORAS and PLATO, and returned back to the ſoul of the univerſe when it left the body; to that ſoul which is of the ſame kind and nature, "ad id quod ejuſ-"dem generis et naturae eſt†." Now the ſoul contracting much impurity in its deſcent into the body, and whilſt it continues in that priſon, theſe philoſophers taught that tranſmigrations of the ſoul thro ſeveral bodies ſerved not only as ſome degree of puniſhment, but likewiſe to purge it from theſe pollutions: and this was the famous doctrine of a metempſychoſis, at leaſt of PLATO's; for between his and that of PYTHAGORAS there ſeems to have been ſome difference. In one reſpect, the difference is obvious enough. The metempſychoſis of PYTHAGORAS was I think general, and that of PLATO not. PLATO claſſed ſouls at their going out of the bodies they had informed into three ſorts, the incurable, the curable, and the pure. The firſt went to the devil, as we ſhould ſpeak, at once. Tranſmigration ſerved the purpoſe of the ſecond, juſt as well as your purgatory, and prepared them to aſcend to their antient habitations in "domeſticas quaſi——ſedes §."

* Stultitiae apotheoſis. BACON.
† PLATO. § PHOTIUS.

The

The laſt, having been purified before death, wanted no purification after it. For this reaſon it was that the philoſophy we refer to, inculcated ſo much the neceſſity of abſtracting the ſoul from matter, and of dying during life a philoſophical death; the conſequence of which was regeneration, being born anew, and putting off the old man to ſpeak in chriſtian phraſe *. Thus the ſoul might be accuſtomed to contemplate, in pure intellect, abſtract forms and eternal eſſences; to retain or to recover by reminiſcence it's former knowledge of real beings, "vere entium †;" to riſe to that ſuperceleſtial place and the field of truth, where ſouls feed on divine ideas ‡. By ſuch excurſions as theſe, not unlike to thoſe that are ſo ingeniouſly feigned in the world of DES CARTES §, the ſoul may know all things intuitively, like God, in this world, and become God in another.

—— "ubi depoſito conſcendes corpore coelum
"Immortalis eris divus ‖."

EMPEDOCLES imagined his ſoul to be ſo pure, that a god might be ſaid to dwell in him, and on that account called himſelf a god, "ſeipſum appellavit deum **." PLATO ſoftened this, by adding modeſtly, "quantum licet homini," as much as a man may be ſo: but that great pneumatic philoſopher ATHANASIUS was bolder than PLATO, if he ſaid, what I have ſeen ſomewhere quoted from his writings, that by a participation of the ſame ſpirit we are united to the Deity ††.

* JAMBLICUS. † Ibid.

‡ —— In locum ſupra coeleſtem, inque campum veritatis —— elevatas, divinis ideis paſci. PHOT.

§ Le monde de DES CARTES, a critical ſatire on the carteſian philoſophy by father DANIEL the jeſuit.

‖ Carm. aurea.

** SEXT. EMPIRIC. adv. MATH.

†† Participatione ſpiritus conjungimur Deitati.

SECT.

SECTION IX.

UPON the whole, we may venture to pronounce that metaphyſicians have always proceeded on a falſe ſuppoſition, by neglecting the real phaenomena of the human mind, and by aſcribing to it an imaginary power. We may venture to ſay, that their principles became prophane and impious, when they deified their own ideas by the firſt apotheoſis I have mentioned, and that they terminated in blaſphemy, enthuſiaſm, and madneſs, when they deified their own ſouls by the ſecond. Such philoſophy as this, however, ſuited extremely well the genius, and, if I miſtake not, the deſign of PLATO. He was much more a poetical philoſopher than HOMER was a philoſophical poet: and he had the worſt grace imaginable when he baniſhed the latter out of his utopia, whoſe writings, with no more help than his own require to fix the allegorical and myſtical ſenſes, would have done juſt as much good in his whimſical republic. If HOMER has done no good, he has done no laſting hurt to philoſophy; whereas PLATO, and his ſcholar ARISTOTLE, did not only improve much error, but diverted men from the purſuit of truth: and this they did, not only in their own age, but have continued to do it at ſeveral periods, and in ſeveral degrees, down to ours. PLATO treated every ſubject, whether corporeal or intellectual, like a bombaſt poet and a mad theologian *, "per ambages Deo-"rumque miniſteria." ARISTOTLE, like an ontoſophiſt and a dialectician, with all the cavil † of words and captious diſpu-

* ——— Tumidus poeta, theologus mente captus. BACON de interp. nat.

† ——— Verborum cavillatio —— et captioſae diſputationes, quae acumen irritum exercent. SEN. ep. 45.

tation, which ſerve to nothing more nor better than to exerciſe a vain and trifling ſubtilty of wit, and to prove equally well, for inſtance, that * mice gnaw or do not gnaw cheeſe, which is an example that SENECA brings by way of ridicule on ſuch philoſophers as theſe, and which might have been applied very ſtrongly to ZENO the founder of his ſect, to CHRYSIPPUS, and all the heroes of the portic. But I chooſe to confirm, what I advance concerning the characters of theſe two philoſophers, in better words and on a better authority than my own. My lord BACON obſerves, that almoſt all the antient naturaliſts, ſuch as EMPEDOCLES, ANAXAGORAS, ANAXIMENES, HERACLITUS, and DEMOCRITUS ſubjected mind to things †. That is, they never loſt ſight of the phaenomena of the viſible world, but made them the rule, as well as object, of their inquiries: and what is ſaid about this object of phyſics, the corporeal world, will hold equally well about the other, the intellectual. But § PLATO, he adds, ſubjected the world to thought, and ARISTOTLE even thought to words: the ſtudy of philoſophy turning into diſputation and plauſible diſcourſe, and a ſevere inquiſition after truth being laid aſide. The meaning of all which is plainly this, that theſe men turned phyſics into metaphyſics and logic; that in order to make, or to appear to make, which anſwered their end perhaps as well, important diſcoveries about the nature and truth of things, one of them had recourſe to abſtract meditation, which agitates the mind in a perpetual round, and can never terminate in certainty for want of a ſuf-

* Mus ſyllaba eſt: mus autem caſeum rodit: ſyllaba ergo caſeum rodit. Mus ſyllaba eſt: ſyllaba autem caſeum non rodit: mus ergo caſeum non rodit. Ibid. ep. 48.

† —— Mentem rebus ſubmiſerunt.

§ At PLATO mundum cogitationibus, ARISTOTELES vero etiam cogitationes verbis adjudicarunt, vergentibus etiam tum hominum ſtudiis ad diſputationes et ſermones, et veritatis inquiſitionem ſeveriorem miſſam facientibus. PARM. Teleſ. et Dem. philoſ.

ficient

ficient criterion; and the other, to an artful uſe of words by which a learned ambiguity is maintained, and the whole buſineſs of philoſophers is to tie and untie theſe verbal knots *. For theſe reaſons, and ſurely they are deciſive, the learned chancellor concludes, that their ſyſtems of philoſophy ought rather to be rejected in the whole kind than to be refuted particularly, ſince they are the ſyſtems of men who affected to ſpeak much, and who knew little †.

It was ſaid, in the beginning of this eſſay, that the pretenſions to ſcience unattainable, which end always in fantaſtical hypotheſes, might be excuſable in thoſe who made the firſt eſſays in philoſophy, but were without excuſe in thoſe who ſucceeded them, in the courſe of philoſophical generations. The reflection was levelled, and very juſtly, at Plato and Aristotle in a particular manner. To paſs any ſuch judgment on thoſe who went before them would be very unfair; becauſe their writings are not in our hands, as thoſe of theſe two philoſophers are, if indeed the canon of Aristotle's be as well aſcertained as that of Plato's, and becauſe the little we can learn of their opinions has been delivered down to us in broken incoherent paſſages, in confuſed and inaccurate collections, and by men very often who did not underſtand them, or who had their reaſons for miſrepreſenting them. To conceive this the better, we need only conſider what informations we have of philoſophical ſyſtems, more modern than thoſe we ſpeak of, and given us by men who were themſelves philoſophers. I might inſtance in many, but I will con-

* Nectimus nodos, et ambiguam ſignificationem verbis illigamus deinde diſſolvimus. Sen. ubi ſup.

† Quare hujuſmodi placita magis toto genere reprehendenda, quam propriè confutanda videntur. Sunt enim eorum qui multum loqui volunt, et parum ſcire. Bac. Parm. &c.

tent myſelf to aſk, whether he that ſhould take all his notions of ſtoiciſm from VELLEIUS, or of epicureaniſm from BALBUS, or of both from the declamation of COTTA, would do much juſtice to the portic, or to the garden of Gargettus? Theſe philoſophies were abſurd enough of themſelves; but they were made more ſo by repreſentation.

WE know, in general, that there were philoſophers in Greece of great merit before PLATO and ARISTOTLE; that PLATO borrowed from them, as well as from HOMER, without any acknowledgments of the debt, and that ARISTOTLE did his beſt to defame or deſtroy their works: for ARISTOTLE, like an ottoman prince, as my lord BACON was fond of obſerving, endeavoured to put all his brethren to death, and ſucceeded in his barbarous deſign *. Among theſe, and probably at the head of them, DEMOCRITUS may be placed. His great reputation gave occaſion to ſilly people, as great reputations do ſometimes, to invent a thouſand ſilly ſtories of him. But of all theſe, no one was more impertinent than that of his putting out his eyes that he might meditate with leſs diſtraction, which PLUTARCH, in his treatiſe about curioſity, ſays was falſe, but generally reported. Another, which we find in PLUTARCH's table diſcourſe †, is much more in character. DEMOCRITUS, having eat a fig which had a taſte of honey, far from ſhutting his eyes and contemplating the firſt ſweet, he ſtarted up from his table in haſte to examine the tree and the place where it grew. His maid indeed ſaved him that trouble by owning, that ſhe had put the figs in a honey pot. But his firſt, and as it were habitual, impulſe was to make uſe of his eyes, and to examine the phaenomenon by obſervation and experiment,

* —— Illum ſcilicet, ottomannorum more, in fratribus trucidandis occupatum fuiſſe; quod et ei ex voto ſucceſſit. De interp. nat. et alibi.

† Sympoſ. lib. 1. c. 10.

which

which he made the rule of his inquiries, the criterion of his opinions, and the foundation of all his philoſophy. "Aeta-"tem inter experimenta conſumpſit," he paſſed his whole life in experiments.

DIOGENES LAERTIUS witneſſeth how averſe PLATO was to this philoſopher, and in truth PYTHAGORAS was more according to his heart. But it were to be wiſhed, ſince PLATO was to have ſo great an influence on the progreſs of ſcience, and ſince his ſpirit was to poſſeſs philoſophers for ſo many ages, that he had taken his method of philoſophiſing from DEMOCRITUS rather than from the Samian. The Samian had been inſtructed, in his travels, in all the parts of philoſophy, and he brought particularly the true ſolar ſyſtem, no doubt, from his eaſtern maſters. He brought likewiſe many of their ſuperſtitious cuſtoms and opinions, and involved, like them, all his doctrines, even the plaineſt precepts of morality, in myſtery. He appears, by the accounts which we find of him in DIOGENES LAERTIUS, in PLUTARCH, in PORPHYRY and JAMBLICUS, to have learned among the egyptian prieſts and the magi the great ſecret of purſuing ambition under the veil of learning, wiſdom, and ſanctity, and to have formed in his travels the project which he undertook at his return to execute the project of opening a ſchool, founding a ſect, inſtituting a religion, and governing all the greek colonies in Italy and Sicily. DEMOCRITUS travelled, like him, and went to the ſame ſchools. In this they were alike. But they differed much in the other reſpects, which could not fail to determine PLATO againſt DEMOCRITUS, and in favor of PYTHAGORAS. Neither of them were magicians, I ſuppoſe, any more than our learned friar, whom the ignorance of his age would have made to paſs for ſuch: and as the credulity of PLINY made him repreſent them and others to have been. But as DEMOCRITUS

was

was no more a magician than every able naturaliſt, chemiſt, and mathematician, will appear in ſome ages, ſo he ſeems to have pretended to no ſupernatural ſcience and power as PYTHAGORAS did, and much leſs, like him, to have been the delian APOLLO, or any other divine perſon cloathed with humanity and converſing with men. In his diſputes with the magi, he ſeems to have oppoſed real phyſics to imaginary metaphyſics, and his knowledge of the animal, vegetable, and mineral world, to all their dreams about the intellectual and ſpiritual. What we know of the atomical ſyſtem of this philoſopher, whether he invented it, or LEUCIPPUS, or a certain Phoenician named MOSCHUS long before either of them, may ſeem little conſonant to true theiſm: and yet his animated atoms, and his intelligent and divine ſpecies, may be reconciled to it, as well as ſome opinions that very orthodox divines have advanced. Philoſophers may ſpeak too little, and too much, of the Supreme Being and firſt cauſe of all things: and neither of old, nor in our days, has the due mean been enough obſerved. Now if it does not appear that DEMOCRITUS, whoſe object was not theology, and among whoſe works, the catalogues of which have been rather falſely lengthened than ſhortened, writ any treatiſe of that ſort, we may ſuppoſe that he made too little mention, or no mention at all of the Supreme Being, without ſuppoſing him for that reaſon an atheiſt. Whereas PYTHAGORAS, who made theology his capital, reaſoned always from heaven to earth, parcelled out the divine nature into a vaſt variety of beings, intereſted it and mingled it in every thing, and contrived to render phyſics a rhapſody of enthuſiaſtical opinions and fables; of which proceeding the Timaeus in PLATO is a very ſtrong and undeniable example. To conclude this compariſon, I will only add, that if DEMOCRITUS did not acknowledge the unity of a firſt intelligent cauſe, and that was objected to him by a pythagorean platoniſt, for they grew

grew in time to be confounded together, one might aſk that famous queſtion, is it no matter "utrum Deum neges, an infa-"mes?" whether you deny or defame God? The ignorance may deſerve pity. The defamation deſerves abhorrence.

If I have ſingled out theſe two, among the philoſophers who preceded Plato, and have dwelled ſo long on their different characters and different methods of philoſophiſing, it has been to ſhew, the more ſenſibly by the contraſt, how and thro what channels the wild metaphyſics and all the prophane theology of the Eaſt has come down principally to theſe inlightened ages of the Weſt, and how, by the purſuit of unattainable knowledge, philoſophers have gone out of the true and natural road to truth into that which has led them into error, and muſt keep them in it, by corrupting ſcience even in the firſt principles.

It is a very true obſervation, and a very common one, that our affections and paſſions put frequently a byaſs ſo ſecret and yet ſo ſtrong on our judgments, as to make them ſwerve from the direction of right reaſon: and on this principle we muſt account, in great meaſure, for the different ſyſtems of philoſophy and religion, about which men diſpute ſo much, and fight and perſecute ſo often. But it is not ſo commonly obſerved, tho it be equally true, that as extenſive as this principle is in itſelf, ſince it extends to almoſt all mankind, the action of it in one ſingle man is ſometimes ſufficient to extend the effects of it to millions. Many a ſyſtem, and many an inſtitution, has appeared and thrived in the world as a production of human wiſdom raiſed to the higheſt pitch, and even illuminated by inſpiration, which was owing, in it's origin, to the predominant paſſion, or to the madneſs of one ſingle man. Authority comes ſoon to ſtand in the place of reaſon. Men come to de-

fend

ſend what they never examined, and to explain what they never underſtood. Their ſyſtem, or their inſtitution, to which they were determined by chance, not by choice, is to them that rock of truth on which alone they can be ſaved from error *: they cling to it accordingly, and doubt itſelf was this rock to the academicians.

WHAT has been ſaid cannot be illuſtrated better than by the example of PLATO. He floriſhed, as we have obſerved, about two centuries after the commencement of the philoſophical age in Greece; for I think that we muſt place the commencement at THALES, wherever we think fit to place the end of it. The ionic, the eleatic, the italic ſects were already founded, and had made much progreſs and much noiſe in the learned world, by the public leſſons, whether in regular ſchools or not it matters little, and by the writings and diſputations of ſeveral great philoſophers, by whom the honor of theſe ſchools had been ſupported, their different hypotheſes improved, and their different methods of inveſtigating truth defended. I have ſaid before, that it is impoſſible to deſcend into the detail of theſe ſyſtems of philoſophy with any aſſurance: and I will add, in this place, that I have never read any pretended explanations of them attempted by modern ſcholars, even in an intelligible manner, for this is not always the caſe, which might not have been for the moſt part altered, and ſometimes contradicted entirely, on the authority of the very ſame fragments. One thing is certain, however, and we may affirm very ſafely, that the difference between attainable and unattainable, real and fantaſtic knowledge, and between the methods that led to one or the other of theſe, was not hard to be diſcerned after all the eſſays that had been made in every

* —— De rebus incognitis judicant, et ad quamcunque ſunt diſciplinam quaſi tempeſtate delati, ad eam tanquam ad ſaxum adhaereſcunt. Acad. quaeſt. l. 2.

part

part of philoſophy, and that were ſtill making when PLATO aroſe. We may believe that there were ſome who did begin to diſcern it accordingly, how much ſoever their notions concerning the firſt philoſophy had been corrupted, and the uſe of their reaſon had been perverted by egyptian and eaſtern prejudices. That ANAXAGORAS did, we cannot doubt; and the cenſure SOCRATES paſſes on him in the Phaedo, makes his panegyric on this head.

DEMOCRITUS paſſed his whole life, and he lived to be more than an hundred years of age, in a conſtant application to experimental philoſophy. But few there were then, or will be at any other time, who prefer ſolitude to ſociety, leiſure to power, knowledge to wealth, and ſilent obſcure truth to talkative and glittering error, as this philoſopher did. If PLATO had followed his example, he might have made poſſibly a great revolution in the philoſophy of his own age, and might have laid poſterity under the obligation of learning from him the way to real, inſtead of being miſled by him into chimerical, ſcience. He might have ſtood like a polar ſtar to direct future generations in their inquiries after truth, inſtead of becoming an ignis fatuus, that has danced before their eyes, and has led them into error. But thoſe very diſpoſitions of mind, and that very character which hindered PLATO from following this example, procured him all the reputation he acquired, and has enjoyed ſo long. In thoſe days, as in ours, philoſophers ſought fame rather than truth, and the fooliſh applauſe of mankind could not fail to ſtrengthen that natural biaſs.

THE greek philoſophers, for the moſt part, reſembled the greek hiſtorians mentioned by STRABO. PLATO did ſo moſt eminently. The hiſtorians, obſerving how fond their countrymen were of thoſe who writ fables, turned hiſtory into ro-

mance, and ſtudied to make their relations marvelous and agreeable, with little regard to truth; in which they were encouraged after ALEXANDER's expedition into Aſia, by the difficulty of diſproving any thing they ſaid of countries ſo remote. Juſt ſo did the philoſophers in general, and PLATO in particular. They took their ideas and notions ſuperficially and inaccurately from the firſt appearances of things, and examined and verified them as little as the others did facts. Theſe ideas and notions were combined and compared by them as every man's fancy ſuggeſted: and they had, beſides theſe, in the inexhauſtible ſtorehouſe of fancy, as many "entia rationis" as might ſupply all their occaſions. Thus the greek philoſophy became a chaos of wild diſcordant opinions and hypotheſes, concerning divine and human, intellectual and corporeal nature, which could neither prove themſelves, nor be reconciled to one another. They were the various offspring of imagination. Of imagination that affected to rove in the divine ſphere, that of poſſibility, and would not be confined to the human, that of actuality. Theſe philoſophical romances, in the light in which they appear to us, may be compared not amiſs to AMADIS of Gaul, to PEIRCEFORREST, and the reſt of thoſe heroical legends, which were writ in defiance of hiſtory, chronology, and common ſenſe, as the others were in defiance of nature, and real knowledge, which were the amuſements of ignorant ages, and which are feigned ſo agreeably by CERVANTES to have turned the brains of DON QUIXOTE. I apprehend that few of them had even the merit which LA CALPRENEDE claimed in favor of his Caſſandra; for he boaſted that, among the fictions it contained, there was no one which might not be deemed true conſiſtently with hiſtory: whereas in the antient philoſophical hypotheſes, how little ſoever we know of them, we know enough to be ſure that there were many opinions advanced abſolutely inconſiſtent with the nature of things, and with the dictates of

right

right reaſon; ſuch as were not only unſupported by either, but as were contradicted by both.

I HAVE touched already the principles from whence all this reaſoning madneſs proceeded; for there is ſuch a thing: and BUCHANAN uſed the expreſſion "gens ratione furens," very properly. The man, who walked ſoberly about in the bedlam of Paris, and believed himſelf God the father, was certainly mad: and yet he reaſoned extremely well when he aſſured the company that the other, who called himſelf God the ſon, was an impoſtor; becauſe he who was the father knew him not, nor had ever ſeen him in heaven. Thus the philoſopher, who is in ſuch haſte to arrive at general, that he neglects particular knowledge, and takes a bold leap from a few clear and diſtinct ideas to the firſt principles of things, how well ſoever he reaſons, is mad. DES CARTES was mad, whenever he did ſo: and none but FONTENELLE would have made it a proof of his ſuperiority over NEWTON, who did the very contrary. Ideas may be clear and diſtinct in the mind, and yet be fantaſtical; or have only metapyſical reality. But ſuppoſe them as real as you pleaſe, yet to make them proper materials of general knowledge, we muſt not attempt to leap, we muſt go ſtep by ſtep, and, by a ſlow gradation of intermediate connecting ideas, from particulars to generals. Beſides, if we ſuppoſe all the ideas we have of both kinds to be in any caſe real, yet ſtill they may not be ſufficient, ſufficient I mean in number. The ſtock we have may ſerve to eſtabliſh one general axiom, but not another, more general, which we endeavour to raiſe upon it. In ſhort, he, who imagines that he can extend general knowledge by the force of pure intellect and abſtract meditation, beyond the foundations that he has laid in particular knowledge, is juſt as mad, in thinking he has what he has not, as he who thinks he is what he is not. He is juſt as mad as the architect

would be, who ſhould undertake to build the roof of the houſe on the ground, and to lay the foundations in the air.

It is not enough to ſay, that Plato was an heroical poet; nor after Longinus, that he derived from Homer, as from a great ſource, very many of his doctrines. He had the genius of thoſe dithyrambic poets, who were ſaid proverbially, and with alluſion to their extravagant ſallies of imagination, never to drink water. He ſpeaks with great reſpect of a divine fury, the principle of ſublime metaphyſical and theological knowledge; and he was ſo full of it himſelf, that no man, a little leſs delirious than Marsilius Ficinus, and a little leſs ſimple and bigot than Dacier, can read his writings, as thoſe of a philoſopher who ſought truth in good earneſt, and meant to inſtruct, rather than to amuſe. Ficinus owns *, ſpeaking of the language of this philoſopher, that "he raves and ram-"bles, obſerves no order like other men in his diſcourſe, and "appears rather to be ſome prieſt or prophet, who raves and "expiates and tranſports others into the ſame fury, than "a man who goes about to inſtruct." Quintilian † ſpeaks to the ſame effect: and even Cicero, as partial as he was, is forced to confeſs, that his ſtyle was rather that of poetry than of proſe. Let me add, that, when he ſinks from theſe imaginary heights of enthuſiaſm and falſe ſublime, he ſinks down, and lower no writer can ſink, into a tedious ſocratical irony, into certain flimſy hypothetical reaſonings, that prove nothing,

* Ad Laur. Med. prom.—furit enim interdum atque vagatur, ut vates, et ordinem interea non humanum ſervat, ſed fatidicum et divinum; neque tam docentis perſonam agit quàm ſacerdotis cujuſdam, atque vatis, partim quidem furentis, partim verò caeteris expiantis, et in divinum furorem ſimiliter rapientis.

† Multum enim ſupra proſam orationem, & quam pedeſtrem Graeci vocant; ſurgit, ut mihi non hominis ingenio, ſed quodam delphico videatur oraculo inſtructus. l. 10. c. 1.

and

and into alluſions that are mere vulgariſms, and that neither explain nor inforce any thing, that wants to be explained or inforced.

As the founder of the academy drew the groteſque of his theology and metaphyſics principally on the canvaſs, that HOMER and PYTHAGORAS had ſpread for him, ſo it ſeems to me, that he propoſed much the ſame objects of ambition to himſelf, as the Samian did. I do not mean to make any ill-natured reflections on his voyages into Sicily, nor on his intrigues with DION, nor to inſiſt on thoſe which have been made. If he took a great ſum of money, it was to buy books. If he rode into Syracuſe in a gilded chariot, drawn by four white horſes, and with all the pomp of a triumph, it was to humor the tyrant he meant to reform. If he obtained a diſtrict of country in Sicily, as PLOTINUS did ſome centuries afterwards in Italy, it was with the ſame deſign, to ſet mankind an example of the moſt perfect form of government. But ſtill we muſt not think him as free from ambition, as SOCRATES ſeems to have been. He took warning indeed from the examples of PYTHAGORAS and of SOCRATES. One taught him to moderate his political, and the other his philoſophical zeal. But ſtill, with all this apparent moderation, he had an ambition as real as any other, though compatible with moderation, and even leaning on the appearances of it, as on ſo many neceſſary ſupports. There is an ambition that burns as hotly under the mantle of a philoſopher, or the cowl of a monk, as in the breaſt of an hero, and that exerts itſelf as effectually, and often as hurtfully to mankind as the other. The cell of BERNARD, or that of HILDEBRAND, even before he got the papacy, was a ſcene of as much intrigue, and as many ambitious projects, as that of FERDINAND the catholic, or of CHARLES the fifth. If the characters of DIONYSIUS the elder and the younger did not ſuf-

fer

fer PLATO to regulate the government, and exercise legislation in Sicily, nor the dotage of the athenian commonwealth in his own country, he acquired however a much greater dominion, than that of Syracuse or of Athens, and held a much nobler and higher rank than that of tyrant or of archon. He could not persuade his countrymen: to attempt to force them he thought unlawful. He retired therefore into the academy, and exercised in that retreat, like BERNARD in his monastery, a far greater power, quietly and safely, than any that princes, or the principal men in commonwealths could boast of, with all the trouble and danger to which they stood continually exposed in their public life. His reputation, and the authority founded on it were such, that appeals were made, and ambassadors sent to him from different people, who solicited him to give them laws; a favor he bestowed on some, and refused to others. In another part of the resemblance between BERNARD and him, the saint indeed outdid the philosopher very much. He acquired immense wealth to his order, as well as to his particular convent. Whereas PLATO left nothing but his philosophy to the philosophers of his sect, in general: and tho he increased the revenues of the academy, and tho the custom of obtaining further acquisitions of wealth by the testamentary dispositions of persons who desired to encourage this school, prevailed from his time; yet all this would have been but a mite in the bernardine treasury.

IN the last part, which I shall mention, of resemblance between these two theologians, the pagan had vastly the advantage over the christian. The order of the monks, instead of maintaining a superiority over other orders, was soon lost in the crowd of them; or if distinguished, was distinguished only by ignorance and luxury, and the pomp of their principal men. Whereas the sect of philosophers did not only eclipse all

all thoſe that were more antient, but outſhine and outlaſt all that were cotemporary or of later inſtitution. It ſpread into Aſia when ALEXANDER carried his arms thither, and into Egypt under the auſpices of his ſucceſſors. Platoniſm returned back, as it were, to thoſe nations from whom the doctrines of it had been derived originally, altered indeed, but eaſily known, and therefore eagerly embraced by the true parents; becauſe of the many allegorical, aenigmatical, cabbaliſtical, myſtical features which it retained of the family.

I DO not believe that PLATO was an enthuſiaſt, in any other ſenſe than you poets affect to appear ſuch, when you call for inſpiration and boaſt of the divine fury: and I could ſooner perſuade my ſelf that he was never in earneſt, than that he was always ſo; for which opinion I ſhall give you my reaſons on ſome other occaſion. But ſure it is, that he has made enthuſiaſts in all ages, and in all churches; in the chriſtian church particularly, the moſt ſeraphic ſaints, and the moſt extravagant heretics: of all which I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak more at large elſewhere; for as this philoſopher had a place frequently in our converſations, the mention of him will return frequently in theſe eſſays; which are repetitions a little extended of the former, and which claim ſome of the liberty allowed in the former.

PLATONISM floriſhed in Italy as well as in Greece, in Aſia, and in Egypt: and the extravagant encomiums of SOCRATES, PLATO, and their ſchool, which we find ſo often repeated by TULLY, would be alone ſufficient to ſhew us how highly this philoſophy was eſteemed in the roman commonwealth. But tho it was held in this eſteem, I think that it had received at that time a blow which made it no longer fit to be propagated with ſucceſs, as it was then taught. It was become a philo-

ſophy

ſophy for ſophiſts and rhetors only; and the dogmatical varniſh, which had impoſed at firſt, being taken off by ARCESILAUS and CARNEADES, there remained nothing in it on which the minds of men, that ſeek naturally to be determined and fixed, could reſt with complacency. Cuppeity and tableity, thoſe ridiculous abſtractions, which DIOGENES laughed at PLATO for ſuppoſing, had paſſed in the world; but to make men doubt of the exiſtence of the cup and the table, was impoſſible.

THE moſt abſurd ſyſtem, that is dogmatical, will prevail ſooner and longer, and more generally, than that of the ſecond or third academy, or that of PYRRHO did, which aroſe about the ſame time; and the dulleſt ſtoician, that ever was, would have perſuaded men to aſſent to this propoſition, "the world is a wiſe being *," as readily as to this, in a bright ſunſhine, "it is now light," much ſooner than CARNEADES would have perſuaded them to lay aſide all claim to deciſion, and to confound true and falſe in the claſs of probability †. It is not worth while to enter into any nice diſtinction that may be made between theſe philoſophies. It is enough for our preſent, or any other reaſonable purpoſe, to conſider them all together as the ſyſtems, if they can be called ſyſtems, of men who entertained a perpetual ſuſpenſion of mind, denied that any certainty was to be had, and diſputed, at moſt, about probability. Such a man as TULLY, who was oſtentatious of his eloquence, might very naturally take, as he did, this part upon him §. He proteſts in his academical queſtions

* Nec magis approbabit nunc lucere —— hunc mundum eſſe ſapientem. Cic. Acad. Quaeſt.

† Philoſophiam —— quae confundit vera cum falſis ſpoliat nos judicio. Ibid.

§ Si aut oſtentatione aliquâ adductus, aut ſtudio certandi, ad hanc potiſſimùm philoſophiam me applicavi, non modo ſtultitiam meam, ſed etiam mores, et naturam condemnandam puto.

againſt

againſt any imputation of oſtentation indeed; but there will be no uncharitableneſs in laying much more weight on what fell from him in the ſecond tuſculan, where he confeſſes, that the cuſtom of diſputing for and againſt every thing pleaſed him much, becauſe it was "maxima dicendi exercitatio." In ſhort, altho the academicians choſe a much more eaſy taſk, when they undertook to refute the ſtoicians and the epicureans, and every other dogmatic ſect, than that of defending the apparent dogmas of their maſter would have been; yet it ſeems to me, that they could not have ſtood long on that foot, nor have acquired the fame, which thoſe madmen, who ſucceeded them in the profeſſion of platoniſm, acquired.

ANTIOCHUS, the third in ſucceſſion from CARNEADES, and the laſt in the direct academic line, began to deviate from the principle and conduct of ARCESILAUS improved by CARNEADES; and, under pretence of reviving the old academy and genuine platoniſm, he taught dogmatically the doctrines he found in PLATO, and blended them with thoſe of the portic and the lyceum. From this time, the falſe ſublime of PLATO began to ſpeak more ſtrongly than ever to the imagination, to the affections and paſſions, and, aided by the quibbles of ZENO, and the ſubtilties of ARISTOTLE, in a ſhort time after to the prejudices of mankind. I ſpeak thus generally, becauſe platonic philoſophy, which had been confined to ſchools in Greece, in Aſia, and in Egypt, or had been cultivated by a few particular genii at Rome, became faſhionable and ſpread more than ever, when it had re-aſſumed the gawdy dreſs of which it had been ſtripped in the academy, for ſeven generations of philoſophers at leaſt. If the roman ladies were not platonics in love, they were ſuch in philoſophical ſpeculation: and the emperors ADRIAN, ANTONINUS,

and MARCUS AURELIUS, for inſtance, were as fond of the philoſophical gown, as of the imperial mantle. JULIAN was ſo, not long after them, to a degree of fanaticiſm.

SECTION X.

WHEN I come to ſpeak of authority in matters of religion, of the chriſtian particularly, it will be proper to ſhew how platoniſm was incorporated with it: how the former ſerved to deck out the artificial theology grafted on revelation, and how the latter ſerved to perpetuate the former. Here I conſider platoniſm relatively to the effects it has had on ſcience in general; and as to them, I ſay, that they have perverted the uſe of reaſon, and corrupted the firſt elements of human knowledge, or ſubſtituted ſuch as are fantaſtical in the place of ſuch as are real. Theſe firſt elements of human knowledge are the ideas we acquire, according to the eſtabliſhed order of human nature, from the very dawn of life. As we grow up we learn of courſe to examine, to compound, and to compare theſe in ſome degree or other, and ſufficiently for our ordinary uſe in the ſtations and circumſtances of life wherein we are placed. If all this be not very accurately done, as it is not always, and perhaps ſeldom, there ariſes very rarely any great inconveniency from it. But the caſe becomes extremely different in matters of higher concern, in thoſe of philoſophy, and of the firſt philoſophy eſpecially. The more complex, and the more abſtract our ideas and notions are, the more likely are we to frame or retain them ill, the conſequence of which muſt be error on the moſt important ſubjects that can exerciſe the human mind. What ſhall we ſay then of a writer, who has not only propagated on theſe ſubjects fantaſtical ideas and notions for real, with an impoſing air, but has attempt-

ed

ed to turn mankind out of the way of framing any others on every ſubject? Shall we ſay, that he was the philoſophical HOMER? We ſhall trifle egregiouſly if we do. Alluſion, allegory, metaphor, and every part of figurative ſtyle is the poet's language. Figments of imagination are his ſubject. The philoſopher may ſometimes employ the former cautiouſly, and under much controul: the latter never. Reaſon muſt be his guide, and truth alone his ſubject. When they are not ſuch, tho he keeps the name, he goes out of the character. He is guilty of fraud. PLATO was eminently guilty of it, and the taint has deſcended, like that of original ſin, to his poſterity.

ALL his lineal ſucceſſors have followed the example he ſet them in ſeveral forms, according to their ſeveral talents. They attempted it even in phyſics. But error of this kind has not been eſtabliſhed, nor fixed, nor ſanctified. Corporeal nature affords a public ſtandard obvious to ſenſe, and by which every man may try the ideas and notions of another, whether they be fantaſtic or real; and for this reaſon phyſical knowledge has been in almoſt a conſtant courſe of improvement, the errors have been from age to age corrected, and the ſenſible phaenomena, which are the objects of it, being numberleſs, it has been vaſtly extended, as well as aſcertained, in theſe latter ages. Since the revival of experimental philoſophy, ſpeculative whimſical naturaliſts have impoſed no more than OVID, who did not mean, nor than LUCRETIUS, who did mean to impoſe, their phyſics for true philoſophy.

PLATO did his beſt to diſgrace this criterion, and to perſuade men not to truſt to it, even to verify their ſimple ideas of ſenſible objects. Metaphyſics ſuited his purpoſe better, juſt as an half light ſuits better than a full light the purpoſe of one who has

falſe wares to vend. We have indeed in our minds a criterion of ſpiritual nature, and of matters purely intelligible. But this criterion is not as public, and as common to all men, as the other. However fantaſtical, inadequate, or confuſed and obſcure the ideas and notions of another man may appear to me, he is at liberty to affirm, that they appear quite otherwiſe in his mind: and tho I may not believe him, I cannot contradict him. What can I ſay to a myſtic, who boaſts of ſpecial grace, and divine illuminations; or to a metaphyſician, who pretends to make incomprehenſible abſtractions, and to clamber up PLATO's myſtic ladder from opinion to knowledge, the knowledge of immaterial forms, more than this, I perceive no ſuch illuminations, I can make no ſuch abſtractions, I have no ſuch ladder? Theſe divines and philoſophers are ſtopped, like their fellow-creatures, on the very outſkirts of the intellectual world, notwithſtanding their boaſts: and if they related nothing of it more than what they have felt, ſeen, and known, they would relate nothing more than other philoſophical travellers. But as they pretend to have gone farther, they may well pretend to have felt, ſeen, and known more.

PLATO was ſuch a traveller, and the father of philoſophical lying to us, who are not acquainted with thoſe who preceded him. Thoſe who preceded him might neglect an exact determination of ideas, and a ſteady uſe of words, the ſigns of theſe ideas, which is no more than all philoſophers are apt to do. But he is to us the firſt who taught men, inſtead of diſtruſting, to renounce their ſenſes in the ſearch of truth; and, inſtead of taking their ideas from the outward impreſſions, and inward ſuggeſtions of nature, to take them from an aſſumed region of ideas which never exiſted out of delirious brains. This doctrine, that poiſons ſcience to the very roots, is in part ſo abſurd,

abſurd, and in part ſo notoriouſly falſe, that we may juſtly wonder how he could miſtake the truth in one caſe, and affirm, if he really meant to affirm, and expected to be believed, directly againſt it in the other. That we cannot have knowledge of ſenſible objects, abſolute knowledge, a knowledge of the eſſences of the ſubſtances, is moſt true; not for the reaſon he gives, becauſe they are in a perpetual flux, always generating, never exiſting: but becauſe we cannot diſcern by our ſenſes their inward conſtitutions and firſt qualities, nor any thing more than their effects on us. Such knowledge is relative to our ſtate, and would not be the ſame in another. It is human knowledge: no more. But ſtill it is one kind of knowledge, and very ſufficient for us. I have not an opinion, I know that I am warmed or burned: and if chriſtianity had been never publiſhed, I ſhould have known, not believed myſelf to be a man, not a cock. As MALEBRANCHE, who was tranſported by the delirium of PLATO, by that of DES CARTES, and by his own all at once, made uſe of faith to realiſe ſenſitive knowledge; ſo PLATO found in the intellectual world the forms and eſſences of ſubſtances, as well as the ideas and notions that we have of mixed modes and relations. All theſe, according to him, were fixed and permanent, eternal exemplars and divine entities, and therefore the ſole objects of ſcience. Reaſon was placed between the objects of intellect and of ſenſe. The "firſt belong to God, and to ſome "of the elect among men *." When reaſon riſes up to the firſt, it acquires the knowledge of things divine: When it deſcends to the latter, it is filled with the errors of opinion. Science is therefore "a comprehenſion of things divine by reaſon †." I take the ſubſtance of what is here ſaid from MARSILIUS FICINUS, to whoſe expoſition of PLATO's meaning there can be no

* Intellectus autem Dei proprius, et paucorum admodum electorum hominum.

† Divinarum rerum certa comprehenſio. MARS. FICIN. ep. in theaetetum.

objection

objection made: and I add, that if I took the whole, the jargon would be ſtill more ſurpriſing.

WHAT man, who was not in the delirium of a metaphyſical fever, and who turned his eyes coolly and ſoberly inward, has not ſeen that we know nothing of ſenſible objects but what our ſenſes diſcover to us, and our memory retains of them after they are diſcovered: and that all thoſe ideal entities, the abſtract forms of them, are the bold fictions of imagination? Who ever reflected on the operations of his mind, and did not perceive, that all his ideas, or complex notions of mixed modes and relations, are the creatures of the mind, who puts them together for her uſe as experience and obſervation direct, nay arbitrarily if ſhe pleaſes; that he never diſcerned them any where but in his own mind; that they are of mere human production, and that, as they are often variouſly combined or compounded by different minds, ſo they are ſeldom preſerved in any mind ſteadily and invariably? Shall we be afraid then to ſay, that the doctrine of ideas in PLATO is abſurd and falſe, and that he has by teaching it corrupted the firſt elements of knowledge? It is manifeſt that he has done ſo: too manifeſt to be denied, and for this reaſon his admirers have endeavoured rather to accuſtom mankind to the abſurdity, by their conſtant imitations of it, than to defend it.

NOTWITHSTANDING all that has been obſerved, and much more that might have been obſerved, to ſhew the fallacy and impertinence of a philoſophy that has been ſo long admired, this philoſophy has rolled down a torrent of chimerical knowledge from pagan and chriſtian antiquity, with little oppoſition, and ſcarce any interruption, to the preſent age; for which reaſon it is as neceſſary to expoſe the futility of this philoſophy now, as it would have been many centuries ago. Not only pagan, but

but chriſtian theology has been derived from PLATO in great meaſure; and, as ſtrangely as that may ſound, even from HOMER too, if he imitated HOMER as much, and borrowed as much from him as LONGINUS and others of the antients affirm. There is a certain marvelous which dazzles and ſeizes the mind, the philoſophical as well as the unphiloſophical; and the man who thinking he underſtands, admires his own underſtanding, as well as the man who admires, becauſe he does not underſtand. This gave a great luſtre to the platonic philoſophy: and is employed in ſeaſon and out of ſeaſon, ſo as to run thro almoſt every part of it. But there is ſomething more to be obſerved. PLATO affected to write ſo equivocally and ſo inconſiſtently, according to the different ſubjects, and different characters of interlocutors, whom he introduces in his dialogues, that he might paſs either for a dogmatiſt, or a ſceptic. The latter academy took this hint: but they followed a middle courſe, denying certainty to the dogmatiſts, and maintaining probability againſt the ſceptics: in which middle courſe they could not, however, have maintained themſelves long, as it has been obſerved already. The latter platonicians therefore aſſumed the doctrines of their maſter to be dogmatical, taught them with all their own improvements as ſuch, ſucceeded better, and laſted longer. Thus has the fame of this ſchool been preſerved, and the philoſophy been propagated, under different forms to one uniform purpoſe, to ſeduce men out of the precincts of real knowledge.

SECTION XI.

NOT only curioſity was indulged, but vanity was gratified by it. An identity in nature, or a cognation, as the learned CUDWORTH

WORTH calls it, of the divine and human mind being once eſtabliſhed, it is no wonder, that the bounds of attainable and unattainable knowledge were confounded, and became undiſcernible. The farther we carry our diſcoveries concerning the animal ſyſtem, wherein we have our place, the more proofs we find that all the parts of it are full of life, and ſenſe, and intelligence, in an inconceivable variety of degrees, but in ſome degree or other: and MALEBRANCHE had reaſon to ſay, "les petits animaux ne manquent pas aux microſcopes, comme "les microſcopes manquent aux petits animaux." Now the moral effect of ſuch a ſurvey as this ſhould be, both a greater adoration of the Supreme Being, and a greater humiliation of ourſelves, who are ſo cloſely connected with the reſt of the animal kind. But the prophane aſſumption we ſpeak of here, which had its foundation in the platonic and pythagoric ſyſtems, tends to leſſen our admiration and adoration of the Supreme Being, or at leaſt the humiliation of ourſelves, by taking our thoughts off from the ſenſible connection between us and other animals, and by applying them to an imaginary connection between the divine and human nature. There are no anthropomorphites I think left, but there have been men among the moſt devout theiſts of paganiſm, and there are thoſe among chriſtian philoſophers and divines, who join God and man as abſurdly by a ſuppoſed ſimilitude of intellect, knowledge, and manner of knowing, as thoſe heretics did by a ſuppoſed ſimilitude of figure. Vanity has not only maintained this abſurdity among the followers of PLATO, but ſpread it among thoſe of different ſects. I will not turn to the extravagant paſſages of this ſort, that are to be found in the writings we have of the latter pythagorician platoniſts. I will mention one only from thoſe of St. AUSTIN, which happens to occur to my memory, and may ſerve "inſtar omnium." Nothing is ſuperior to the human ſoul, ſays that father, but God.

"Nihil

" Nihil eſt potentius-----nihil eſt ſublimius. Quicquid ſupra " illam eſt jam creator eſt." This doctrine the ſaint learned, as he learned that of the divine logos, from PLATO, or from thoſe madmen, the diſciples of PYTHAGORAS and PLATO. In ſhort, the vanity of the human heart indulged itſelf in this kind of flattery ſo much, that even the ſtoics borrowed the ſame notions. Human reaſon is, according to SENECA, not only a portion of the divine ſpirit immerſed in body, the ſame in God and in man, with this ſole difference, in him it is perfect, in us capable of perfection *; but it was an axiom of that ſchool, that the ſoul is divine, and all divine natures are the ſame †.

PHILOSOPHERS being thus drawn, in their own conceit, out of that claſs of beings in which the creator had placed them, and having placed themſelves, according to their own good pleaſure, and without any other claim to it than arbitrary aſſumption, in a ſort of middle ſtate, at leaſt, between God and man, in which too they pretended themſelves able to place others by certain metaphyſical noſtrums, theſe mountebanks and their zanis were eaſily induced to imagine, that ſince their ſouls were immortal, and participant of the divine nature, they were capable of knowledge of all kinds, and of wiſdom more than human, even whilſt they wore the garb of humanity. Believing themſelves wrapped up in pure intellect, whilſt they were in truth tranſported by mere imagination, they aſſumed their knowledge, like their nature, to be divine. Clogged by bodies, and confined for a time to this inferior ſyſtem, they could not enjoy the full prerogatives of their own, nor attain complete abſolute knowledge. But ſtill they enjoyed and ex-

* In corpus humanum pars divini ſpiritûs merſa —— diis hominibuſque communis. In illis conſummata eſt. In nobis conſummabilis.

† Divinorum una natura eſt.

erciſed theſe prerogatives in a good degree, clogged and confined as they were, when they abſtracted their ſouls from their bodies, by ſpiritual exerciſes and profound meditation, and roſe by this abſtraction in pure intellect up to contemplate the divine ideas, and to know, if not as much as God, yet in the ſame manner, and much more than other men. PLOTINUS, who was ſo aſhamed to wear a body, that he would never ſuffer any picture of it to be drawn, had been raviſhed more than once, as PORPHYRY affirms, to an union with the ſupreme intelligence, and he himſelf had been ſo once. It was not hard for ſuch philoſophers to believe, and to make it believed, that the knowledge unattainable by others was attainable by them, and that whilſt ordinary perſons, incumbered by body, and groveling on earth, acquired with much pains a little particular knowledge, they had the metaphyſical ſecret of riſing to univerſals.

SUCH as theſe were the men, who iſſuing from the ſchools of pythagoric and platonic philoſophy, diſturbed the progreſs of real knowledge, and by flattering the vanity of the human mind, turned it to fantaſtical. Heathens adopted theſe notions the more eaſily, becauſe they had already adopted thoſe of genii, of daemons, of celeſtial and ſuperceleſtial gods, who formed a chain of intelligence from the human up to the ſupreme. Chriſtians too might adopt them the more readily, becauſe they had other as undetermined ideas of cherubim and ſeraphim, of thrones, principalities, powers, and virtues, of archangels and angels, of three hierarchies, and nine choirs of celeſtial ſpirits, figments of crackbrained enthuſiaſts, ſuch as DENYS the areopagite, and the ſcholar of St. PAUL, if in truth there was any ſuch perſon, and if ſome pious knave did not forge the book and an author for it. Theſe notions might ſerve, as well as thoſe of the heathens, to form an intellectual chain, and

and a ſhort gradation of intelligence from God to man. But orthodox Chriſtians had no need of any ſuch chain. They knew by the ſcriptures, that the correſpondence between God and man was often immediate and even intimate and familiar with his elect, and with ſuch purified ſouls as were prepared for it. They found in the old teſtament one example of a patriarch tranſlated very corporeally into heaven, and one in the new of an apoſtle raviſhed thither, he knew not how. But the whole tenor of the ſacred writings repreſented the Supreme Being, in frequent conference with his creatures, God covenanting, or making bargains with man, and man with God; God holding the language of man, reaſoning, arguing, expoſtulating, in a very human manner, animated by human affections, and appealing to human knowledge. In ſhort, they believed farther, on the ſame authority, that the word, the wiſdom of the father, the very God, had been incarnated here on earth, aſſumed an human body, lived like a man with men, and died at once by their hands and for their ſakes. It could not be hard ſurely for thoſe who believed all this, and who were accuſtomed to think in this manner of the divinity, to be perſuaded, that God knew by the help of ideas, like man, ſo cloſe was the analogy between their natures, that there were two regions of ideas, the one of ideas of ſenſe, the other of ideas of pure intellect; that the former being nothing more than repreſentations of appearances, and relative ſolely to the ſyſtem in which they aroſe, nothing more could be acquired by them than probability, and opinion founded on it, ſufficient indeed for vulgar uſe, tho not ſo for philoſophical purpoſes; but that minds illuminated by philoſophy could riſe to the higher region in which alone certainty and ſcientifical knowledge were to be acquired by contemplating thoſe intellectual ideas, abſtract natures, eternal eſſences, incorporeal ſubſtances, and all the objects of metaphyſics.

From ſuch fantaſtical notions we know, that men ſet out in ſearch of fantaſtical knowledge above two thouſand years ago, and how much ſooner we cannot ſay. In hopes of reaching unattainable, they neglected attainable knowledge, ſcorned to confine themſelves to that, to which they were confined by the author of nature, and attempting to riſe above the level of humanity, they ſunk below it; for they ſurely are below it, who imagine themſelves to be what they are not, to have knowledge where they can have none, and to want it where it lies open to their induſtry.

It would have been no agreeable attempt in thoſe days, nor is it a welcome one in theſe, to fix the bounds of attainable and unattainable knowledge. The philoſophers we ſpeak of are as ridiculous in a quite contrary ſenſe, as the learned mandarins of the Chineſe. The mandarins had decided, that China, a part of Tartary, the other ſtates that lay round them, and the neighbouring iſlands contained the whole world. They knew no other, they inquired after no other, and were aſtoniſhed therefore when the jeſuits ſhewed them a map of the two hemiſpheres. The philoſophers remain unacquainted with their own country, and inquire little about it, or about thoſe that lie neareſt to it. They are wholly taken up with imaginary countries at an immenſe diſtance, where they never were, and concerning which they can have no intelligence from any that have been there. But the abſurdity of abſurdities is this. They pronounce dogmatically, and they pretend to demonſtrate when they ſpeak of theſe unknown countries, and they ſink into doubt and hypotheſis when they ſpeak of their own.

Could philoſophers have been perſuaded to analiſe the human mind, to examine intuitively the faculties of it, and to compare

compare them with the objects of their inquiry, the extravagant notions ſpoken of might have been ſoon exploded, the progreſs of fantaſtical knowledge might have been ſtopped early, and that of real knowledge might have been advanced without interruption.

But the ill ſtar of knowledge contrived to render this impracticable. It has been ſaid, that Aristotle was an ungrateful ſcholar to his maſter Plato. It may be ſo. But this obligation, at leaſt, the maſter had to the ſcholar. The ſcholar raiſed a miſt that hindered men from diſcerning, as they might have done ſooner or later, the abſurdity of his philoſophy: and this miſt continued thickening before the eyes of men for many ages. The Romans were far from correcting and improving the greek philoſophy. They contented themſelves to tranſlate and imitate: and the ſame ſervile manner of philoſophiſing was followed after the reſurrection of letters. A ridiculous veneration for Plato revived with them: and Aristotle maintained in the ſchools the empire he had uſurped every where during the dark ages of gothic, of arabian, and of eccleſiaſtical barbarity. The antient fathers of the church had recommended theſe two philoſophies ſufficiently to more modern doctors, by their example and writings. But Aristotle had helped to defend what Plato had helped principally to eſtabliſh, and as defence grew more and more neceſſary from age to age, ſo the reputation and authority of Aristotle, which were great in the mahometan, ſeemed to riſe above thoſe of Plato in the chriſtian ſchools of philoſophy: or at leaſt to be more employed in them. I am not ignorant that many paſſages of the fathers and other chriſtian writers may be cited againſt the peripatetic philoſophy. But theſe paſſages ſerve only to multiply proofs, that theſe venerable perſons were apt to contradict one another, and even themſelves.

Cardinal

Cardinal PALAVICINI was very angry with father PAUL for ſaying, when he ſpeaks of the ſixth ſeſſion of the council of Trent, wherein ſo much uſe was made of the diſtinctions of the ſtagyrite, * that without this aſſiſtance "we ſhould have had "many articles of faith the leſs." The cardinal denies the fact ſo little, that he juſtifies the proceeding by the example of thoſe antient councils, who did the ſame when they diſtinguiſhed ſo nicely ſubſtance, perſon, and hypoſtaſis. I know not whether it be true, tho I incline to believe it if MELANCTHON ſaid it, that the ethics of ARISTOTLE were read publicly in ſome churches inſtead of the goſpels. But every one knows, that he and his philoſophy have been ſpoken of by great divines and moſt devout perſons of the chriſtian and mahometan churches, in terms ſo hyperbolical, that they are blaſphemous.

BY ſuch combinations of circumſtances, and by others that were favorable to the ariſtotelian philoſophy, a jargon of words, that ſeemed to explain, without explaining, and the rules of a dialectic, that ſeemed to prove, and that did prove indifferently either in favor of truth, or of error, took up the whole attention of philoſophers, and rendered it impoſſible for them to make any advances in learning and knowledge. All the rational powers of the ſtrongeſt minds were ſo miſapplied, that giants employed themſelves in picking ſtraws; and men, whoſe intellectual ſight might be compared to that of LYNCEUS, wandered about in a metaphyſical and logical miſt, always in ſearch of truth, finding it ſeldom, and miſtaking often even error for it. Fantaſtical ideas, new invented words, and new applications of old words put into a quaint ſyllogiſtical form, made up the ſum of the mirabilia, the inopinata, and the paradoxes of the ſtoics. Much in the ſame manner

* Noi mancavamo di molti articoli di fede. Hiſt. del con. trid. l. 2.

did

did ſchoolmen proceed in ſubtiliſing their ideas and notions, and in turning and winding them by rules of art, without any concern to compare them with nature, and to verify and fix them by what is. The conſequence has been, that altho much of the cant of the ſchools is laid aſide, yet many fantaſtical or undetermined ideas and notions, and many unmeaning words, or words of vague ſignification, which grew into uſe, or were confirmed in uſe then, impoſe ſtill; and that even ſome of our fineſt writers banter themſelves and others with them. It muſt not be imagined, that he who reaſons, or ſeems rather to reaſon cloſely and conſequentially, has therefore truth always on his ſide. To be ſure of this, we muſt be ſure that his words have ideas and notions perceivable by us, attached to them; we muſt be ſure that all theſe are ſteadily employed, and we muſt be able, by a careful analyſe of the ideas and notions, where there is the leaſt room for doubt, to diſcern whether they are fantaſtical or real, and adequate and complete, clear and diſtinct, or the contrary, relatively to the ſubjects about which they are employed. If we do this, we ſhall be neither ſeduced by declamation, nor deceived by argumentation. Some writers impoſe, as fairies and enchanters in romances are ſaid to have done; but if we do this, their charms will be broke, and either nothing, or ſomething extremely abſurd or weak will appear, where a ſtupendous and ſolid pile preſented itſelf to our firſt ſight. If we neglect this, not only MALEBRANCHE, or the biſhop of Cloyne, thoſe excellent poets, may lead us agreeably "per ambages "deorumque miniſteria," thro ſuch mazes of error as none but the brighteſt genii are able to contrive; but your ghoſtly father, if you had one, might undertake to convince you by dint of logic, that when he affirms the ſame body to be at the ſame inſtant in different places, he is far from affirming, that the ſame body is and is not in the ſame place.

SEC-

SECTION XII.

It will ſound oddly to ſome ears, that the right uſe of reaſon, and the right conduct of the underſtanding in the inveſtigation of truth, and the acquiſition of real knowledge, is a very late diſcovery; and yet nothing is more certain. It was not near ſo ſoon after the reſurrection of letters, as it might have been expected, that the fantaſtical and faſhionable philoſophy of Plato and Aristotle began to be exploded. Little by little, however, there aroſe men, who made this uſe of the light that increaſed gradually in the orb of ſcience. There were ſome eſſays made, faintly, diffidently, and occaſionally at firſt, like thoſe of men, who emerging out of darkneſs, were dazzled as well as enlightened, or of men who were ſenſible that they might ſuffer for ſaying, that they had ſeen what they had ſeen, or that they knew what they knew, in oppoſition to the confirmed prejudices of mankind. Others followed with greater aſſurance, like men born in the light, whoſe eyes were able to bear a greater effulgence of it, and who beſides this had leſs, for even they had ſomething to fear from eccleſiaſtical, abetted by civil power. One of theſe, and the firſt that deſerves to be named in this roll, was our Verulam, that aſtoniſhing genius, who durſt form the deſign of rebuilding ſcience from the foundations. I preſume not to ſay how near he brought this deſign to bear, nor how practicable he left it. But this I may ſay, that the foundations were ill laid before his time, and that he laid, on the rock of nature and truth, ſuch as can alone ſupport this building. The meaneſt cottage, that art ever raiſed, can reſt on no other ſafely, and the moſt ſtupendous pile of philoſophical ſyſtems may reſt on theſe immoveably. Whatever eſteem he

he was tempted to think, by a review of their ſcattered remains, that the more antient philoſophers of Greece might deſerve, he conſidered the works of PLATO and of ARISTOTLE, which have been alone preſerved, as the bane of philoſophy. They had been followed ſervilely from their own age to his, by which means they had ſtood as barriers againſt all improvement, and the poiſonous ſprings they had opened continued to infect all the ſtreams of knowledge. He attempted, therefore, to depoſe theſe tyrants in philoſophy, and to draw men off from the enthuſiaſm of one, and the ſophiſtry of the other, from the contemplation of confuſed and ill abſtracted ideas and notions, and from a wanton, not to ſay a fraudulent, uſe of words, to the contemplation of nature, and a ſtrict regard to things. The very firſt aphoriſm of the novum organum ſtates the only true object of human knowledge, and limits that which every man may be ſaid to have acquired, to what he has diſcovered of nature by obſervation and experience *.

HUMAN knowledge, to be real, muſt be derived from, and tried by what really is, according to my lord BACON and to truth: and he was ſo far from indulging the licentious uſe which philoſophers make of that dangerous power of the mind, the power of imagining what may be, and of erecting hypotheſes into ſyſtems of knowledge, that he inſiſts on the neceſſity, not that we ſhould doubt of every thing, but that we ſhould examine every thing, that we ſhould purge our minds of all thoſe idols, as he ſtyles them, thoſe falſe and ſuperficial notions that are taken from vulgar opinion, and at beſt from philoſophical rumor, which were the foundations of platoniſm, tho PLATO uſed ſome ſort of induction, and of peripateticiſm;

* Homo naturae miniſter, et interpres tantum facit et intelligit, quantum de naturae ordine, re, vel mente, obſervaverit: nec amplius ſcit, aut poteſt.

and finally, that the mind being thus prepared to receive the direct or reflected rays of truth, we ſhould not reject, but aſſiſt and controul ſenſe in a courſe of learned experience, abſtract our notions from things with the utmoſt accuracy, and proceed, as far as we can proceed, in the ſame manner, to aphoriſms and axioms more and more general.

WHILST the fame of this great man was freſh, and his works were in every learned hand both at home and abroad, DES CARTES aroſe, another luminary of the philoſophical world, and I could eaſily ſuſpect that my lord BACON's writings were not unknown to him; for as little as it is pretended he uſed to read, he did not diſdain to borrow from authors of inferior note, of the ſame country: and they who repay with ample intereſt, like DES CARTES, into the common ſtock of learning, need not be aſhamed to borrow ſometimes. The french philoſopher, like the engliſh, made clear and diſtinct ideas the neceſſary materials of knowledge. But then, as he left this important article too general and too looſe, ſo whilſt he built up truth with one hand, he laid a foundation for infinite error on the other. He diſarmed the ſcholaſtics; but he furniſhed arms to the myſtics. Beſides clear and diſtinct ideas, he admits a certain inward ſentiment of clearneſs and evidence. The word ſentiment is applied in the french language ſo variouſly and ſo confuſedly, that it becomes often equivocal. But ſince it is diſtinguiſhed, on this occaſion, from idea, it muſt be meant either to ſignify that immediate perception which the mind has of ſome ſelf-evident truth, in which caſe it is not a principle of knowledge, but knowledge itſelf, intuitive knowledge; or elſe it muſt be meant to ſignify that apparent evidence wherewith notions and opinions enter into the mind of one man, that are not accompanied with the ſame evidence, nor received in the ſame manner, in the

the mind of another. Now in this caſe, the lively inward ſentiment of DES CARTES is nothing better than that ſtrong perſuaſion, wherewith every enthuſiaſt imagines that he ſees what he does not ſee, hears what he does not hear, feels what he does not feel, and, in a word, perceives what he does not perceive. If any thing elſe be meant by ſentiment, thus diſtinguiſhed from idea, as a principle of knowledge, I confeſs my ſelf unable ſo much as to gueſs what it is. But notwithſtanding this, DES CARTES holds an high rank among thoſe benefactors to mankind in the advancement of knowledge, who freed human reaſon from the chains of authority. He improved natural philoſophy by geometry, and geometry by algebra: in which reſpect, he ſhewed the way to our NEWTON.

GASSENDI was another of theſe reformers of philoſophy, and the reſtorer of the atomical doctrine. He expoſed, even to ridicule, the dialectics of ARISTOTLE: he diſarmed the peripateticians of theſe enchanted weapons, and would have completed, by his victories over them, the ſubverſion of their long eſtabliſhed empire, if he had not apprehended, with reaſon, enemies much more formidable than mere philoſophers, becauſe armed with eccleſiaſtical and civil power. It is this fear, which has hindered thoſe who have combated error in all ages, and who combat it ſtill, from taking all the advantages which a full expoſition of the truth would give them. Their adverſaries triumph, as if the goodneſs of their cauſe had given them the victory, when nothing has prevented their entire defeat, and reduced the conteſt to a drawn battle, except this, that they have employed arms of every kind, fair and foul, without any reſerve; whilſt the others have employed their offenſive weapons with much reſerve, and have even blunted their edge when they uſed them.

If it was my deſign to ſpeak of all thoſe, who have advanced real knowledge in all its parts, ſince the reſurrection of letters, beyond ſuch of the antients, at leaſt, as we are acquainted with, the roll would be a long one. But my intention being to ſpeak of thoſe alone, who have ſtudied the human mind, rectified, or pretended to rectify, the errors of it, and thereby improved, or pretended to improve, our reaſon, I ſhall content my ſelf to mention two that are the beſt known to me. Mr. Locke, and the author, perhaps I ſhould ſay authors, of the logic of Port royal.

The firſt ſteps towards a right conduct of the underſtanding, and a juſt diſcernment of unattainable knowledge, and of that which is attainable, in different kinds and degrees, are an accurate analyſe of the mind, a careful review of the intellectual faculties, as well ſeparately as in their cooperations, and an attentive obſervation of the whole intellectual procedure, natural and habitual, as it has been hinted already. When this is well and truly done by any writer, the reader will feel conſciouſly that it is ſo; for he will perceive the phaenomena of his own mind to be ſuch as they are repreſented, and he will recollect, that the ſame things have paſſed there, tho he has not always, or at all obſerved them. This happens to me when I read the eſſay on human underſtanding. I am led, as it were, thro a courſe of experimental philoſophy. I am ſhewn my ſelf; and in every inſtance there is an appeal to my own perceptions, and to the reflections I make on my own intellectual operations. I know that this method is diſagreeable to ſome, and I am not ſurpriſed that it ſhould be ſo. There are thoſe who think they do not want it: and they are thoſe who want it moſt. There are thoſe likewiſe who fear it; becauſe they apprehend that analyſe of ideas and notions, that

that compariſon of them with the real nature of things, and that ſteady preciſion in the uſe of words, which would reduce many a dogmatic ſyſtem to paſs for nothing better than a fanciful hypotheſis, as it really is.

THE logic of Port royal will ſuit ſuch perſons as theſe, and eſpecially thoſe of the ſecond ſort much better. In whatever language or country this treatiſe had been publiſhed, it would have appeared to be not an art of thinking, but an art of thinking conformably to chriſtian doctrines, and to thoſe of Rome particularly. It is contrived to mangle and diſtort human reaſon, ſo as to proportion it, I do not ſay to revelation, but to theology; tho theology ſhould be proportioned to reaſon: and I add, that if reaſon could be made by abuſe to ſerve the purpoſes of this theology, it might be made by no greater, nay by the very ſame abuſe, to ſerve the purpoſes of any other, pagan or mahometan. Now this proceeding is unfair: and he who holds it means to deceive, not to inſtruct. The true art of thinking muſt be the ſame among all mankind, ſince their intellectual ſyſtem, and the things of nature from which their ideas and notions ought to be abſtracted, are the ſame. But if this example was followed, the art of thinking would vary, as the different metaphyſics of MENCIUS and DES CARTES, or the different theologies of the bonzes and the jeſuits, vary. Art ſhould direct practice: but thus, practice would direct art. There would be one art of thinking for Chriſtians, one for the doctors of Mecca, one for the literati in China, and ſo on.

THO I give, on this occaſion, a preference to BACON and to LOCKE over DES CARTES and the author of the logic of Port royal, it is not from ſo mean and contemptible a motive as this would be, that they were engliſhmen. The advancement

ment of knowledge, and the improvement of reaſon are of common concern to all rational creatures. We are all of the ſame country in theſe reſpects: and he who thinks and acts otherwiſe is a promoter of faction in the great commonwealth of learning. As much as I admire theſe two philoſophers, I am not blind to their errors; for even I, who have no teleſcopical eyes, can diſcern ſpots in theſe ſuns. I can diſcern a tincture, and ſometimes more than a tincture, in BACON, of thoſe falſe notions which we are apt to imbibe as men, as individuals, as members of ſociety, and as ſcholars, and againſt which he himſelf is very ſolicitous to put us on our guard. I am convinced, more by his example than by what he ſays, that theſe falſe notions render the admiſſion of truth into the mind more difficult, and the hold of error more ſtrong. I can diſcern, in Mr. LOCKE, ſometimes ill abſtracted and ill determined ideas, from which a wrong application of words proceeds, and propoſitions to which I can by no means aſſent. I confeſs farther, that I have been, and am ſtill, at a loſs to find any appearance of conſiſtency in an author who publiſhed a commentary on the epiſtles of St. PAUL, and a treatiſe of the reaſonableneſs of chriſtianity, which he endeavours to prove by fact and by argument, after having ſtated, as clearly as he had done, the conditions and the meaſures of hiſtorical probability, and after having written, as ſtrongly as he had done, againſt the abuſe of words. I think that neither BACON nor LOCKE have kept up entirely to their own rules. But I think theſe rules are eſtabliſhed by them more truly than by any others.

THAT they are not ſo, in one very conſiderable inſtance, by DES CARTES, I have obſerved already, and ſhall not ſeek for any other in that reſpectable author. But the charge I have brought againſt the logic above mentioned is ſo very heavy, and this fault among others runs ſo evidently thro the whole book, that

that I think it neceſſary to produce ſome examples of it. To produce them will be ſufficient. I ſhall make few or no reflections on them. Turn, if you pleaſe, to the fourth chapter of the firſt part, and to the fourteenth of the ſecond, which treat of the ideas of things and the ideas of ſigns, and of the propoſitions wherein the names of things are given to their ſigns. You will ſoon ſee how far this writer was from meaning any improvement to human reaſon, by all the trifling matter he puts gravely and dogmatically together.

That we have ideas which are made ſometimes to ſtand as ſigns of other ideas is true, and ſo we have ideas which are made to ſtand in the relations of cauſe and effect to other ideas. But the ideas of both theſe kinds may be conſidered unrelatively, and they become ideas of ſigns, or cauſes, or effects, by an occaſional act of the mind, which joins them ſometimes properly, and ſometimes improperly in theſe relations to others. The idea of reſpiration, like that of ſpontaneous motion, is one of thoſe that compoſe our complex idea of every animal. It is a part of the idea, not a ſign of the whole. It cannot be the ſign of any particular animal, becauſe it is common to all animals. It cannot be the ſign of animality, or the ſuppoſed abſtract idea of animal, becauſe we have no ſuch idea. It cannot be the ſign of that confuſed crowd of ideal animals that the mind repreſents to itſelf, whenever we endeavour to think of animals in general, any more than the ſign of any particular animal. They all imply it, and they may be ſaid to be ſo many ſigns of reſpiration, juſt as well as reſpiration to be a ſign of them.

But be this as it will, about which it is ſilly to beſtow many words, let us obſerve that this author, who pretends to teach men how to think, endeavours to impoſe on them very groſſly, as groſſly as if he had imagined that they could not think at all

all without his help. Having amuſed his readers with the hypotheſis of ideas of ſigns, made ſuch by nature in ſome caſes, and by inſtitution in others, that are ſometimes certain and ſometimes probable, all which is very proper to perplex the thoughts of young logicians; he ſlides in, as evident examples of what he advances, ſuch as have not even an apparent connection with it. He diſtinguiſhes moſt nicely between ſigns that are joined to things, and ſigns that are ſeparated from them. Symptoms, he ſays, the ſigns of ſickneſs, are joined to ſickneſs. Let it be that they are ſo in nature, and in our ideas, however this matter might be otherwiſe explained. But then he adds, as if all theſe were things analogous, "thus "the ark, the ſign of the church, was joined to NOAH and "his children, who were the true church at that time: thus "our material temples, the ſigns of the faithful, are often "joined to the faithful: thus the dove, the ſign or figure of "the holy ghoſt, is joined to the holy ghoſt: thus the "waſhing of baptiſm, the ſign or figure of ſpiritual regenera-"tion, is joined to this regeneration." In ſpeaking of ſigns that are ſeparated from things, he is not ſo profuſe of examples. He produces one only, but that as appoſitely as any of the others. It is taken from the ſacrifices of the moſaic inſtitution, which were, he ſays, ſo many ſigns of Jeſus Chriſt offered up in ſacrifice.

I MIGHT conclude my extracts here. But ſince it is of uſe to ſhew how great reaſon there is to guard againſt the fraud, as well as madneſs, of philoſophy, it may be proper to mention a few more paſſages of the ſame abſurdity or ridiculous importance out of this famous book. We are told then farther, that "a thing may hide and diſcover another thing at the ſame "time. It may be thing and ſign at the ſame time, and may "hide as thing, what it diſcovers as ſign. Hot aſhes, as a thing, hide

" hide the fire; as a ſign, diſcover it. The forms that angels " borrowed, as things, hid them; as ſigns, diſcovered them. " The euchariſtical ſymbols, as things, hide the body of " Chriſt; as ſigns, diſcover it." Again, we are taught, that " the nature of a ſign being to excite in the ſenſes the idea of " the thing figured by the idea of the thing figuring, as long as " this effect ſubſiſts, that is, as long as this double idea is " excited, the ſign ſubſiſts, even tho the thing be deſtroyed " in it's own nature. Thus, it is of no moment whether the " colors of the rainbow, which God has taken for a ſign " that he will deſtroy mankind by a deluge no more, be real " and true, provided that the ſame impreſſion be always " made on our ſenſes, and that they (can he mean our ſenſes?) " make uſe of this impreſſion to conceive the promiſe of God. " Juſt ſo, it is of no moment that the bread of the euchariſty " ſubſiſt in its proper nature, provided that the image of " bread, which ſerves us to conceive in what manner the body " of Chriſt nouriſhes our ſouls, and how the faithful are " united one with another, be excited conſtantly in our ſenſes." One may now ſafely challenge the ableſt profeſſor in bedlam to crowd more nonſenſe into fewer words, and yet it is faithfully extracted from a book which is put into the hands of young men, as I remember that it was into mine, in order to improve their reaſon, by teaching them a right determination of their ideas, and a right conduct of their underſtanding.

To ſay the truth, tho experimental philoſophy has been vaſtly improved by the moderns, and tho a true conduct of the underſtanding may be ſaid juſtly enough to be a new diſcovery in general, yet the ſame reformers, who have rooted up a monſtrous crop of old errors, have left ſome of theſe, and have planted others. The firſt philoſophy particularly has been

over-run with both: and learning has finiſhed the round, which ignorance began. In the darkneſs of ignorance, ſuperſtition prevailed: in the light of knowledge, overweaning curioſity, the offspring of ſelf-conceit, as ſelf-conceit is of pride. Both are natural to the human mind, and each of them developed itſelf into activity at different times, and in that ſtate of things that was proper to it. Superſtition firſt: for ignorant, unciviliſed people, who are fierce to their fellow creatures, are timid and docile under every apprehenſion of ſuperior power. Of theſe diſpoſitions in favorable conjunctures, the perſian ZERDUSHT, whoever he was, the indian FOE, and the arabian MAHOMET, knew how to profit: and the magi, the bonzes, and the doctors of Mecca, were not at liberty, if they were inclined, to frame their notions of the firſt philoſophy, according to nature and truth. They were to think on the principles their maſters had laid. Theſe were to be aſſerted, not examined. Fact was to be bent, and common ſenſe perverted, into a conformity with them. Puerilities and vulgariſms were to be taken for marks of a divine ſimplicity, and the ravings of enthuſiaſm for the myſterious language of inſpiration. If the caſe has not been quite ſo bad in the chriſtian world, yet I will undertake to ſhew you, in another of theſe eſſays, as I endeavoured to do in one of our converſations, that the ſuperſtitions of ignorant ages, and the fantaſtical knowledge of thoſe that were more learned, have produced ſome as extravagant opinions in theology among Chriſtians, orthodox and heretics, as any we can reproach to the mahometans, or even to the pagans, and that they work their effect even at this hour.

ALL errors, even thoſe of ignorance and ſuperſtition, are hard to remove when they have taken long hold of the minds of men, and eſpecially when they are woven into ſyſtems of religion.

religion. But there are ſome from which men are unwilling to depart, and of which they grow fond, for a reaſon that has been often touched. As men advance in knowledge, their ſelf-conceit and curioſity are apt to increaſe, and theſe are ſure to be flattered by every opinion that gives man high notions of his own importance. What contradictions and inconſiſtencies are not huddled together in the human mind? Superſtition is produced, by a ſenſe of our weakneſs; philoſophical preſumption, by an opinion of our ſtrength; and ſuperſtition and preſumption contribute alike to continue, to confirm, and propagate error.

A SYSTEM of philoſophy, which had not contained a ſyſtem of theology, as well as of politics, would have been held in no eſteem among the antients. Many ſuch were formed, but with theſe conſiderable differences between the two ſorts. Errors in rules of policy and law were eaſy to be corrected by experience, like errors in natural philoſophy. Nay the firſt were ſo the moſt, becauſe how little regard ſoever philoſophers might have to experience in either caſe, the truth would force itſelf upon them, or others; in one by the courſe of affairs; whereas it muſt be ſought, to be had in the other. But when it was ſought, it was obtained. Errors in theology and metaphyſics could not be thus corrected; neither eaſily, nor at all, among men who ſeemed tacitly agreed to admit and confine themſelves to no criterion in theſe ſciences, neither to the phaenomena of their own ſpirits in their doctrines about ſpiritual nature, nor to the works of God and the conduct of his providence in their ſpeculations about his attributes.

ANOTHER difference between ſyſtems of theology and thoſe of politics and laws has been, and always muſt be, this, that the latter may be various, nay contrary to one another, and yet

be ſuch as right reaſon dictates; provided they do not ſtand in oppoſition to any of the laws of our nature. But in theological reaſonings, and thoſe which are called metaphyſical, the various opinions may be all falſe, or if they are not all ſo, one alone can be true. This conſideration ſhould have had two effects. It ſhould have rendered philoſophers and divines more cautious in framing opinions on ſuch ſubjects, and leſs poſitive in maintaining them from the beginning: and when they found a multitude of queſtions ariſe, which were indeterminable for want of a ſufficient criterion, they ſhould have ceaſed the purſuit of unattainable knowledge, and have confined themſelves to the improvement of that which God has judged ſufficient for us, and has given us the means of acquiring. The very contrary has happened to ſuch a degree of extravagance, as muſt ſeem delirious to every one who is not in the ſame delirium. Can he be leſs than mad who pretends to contemplate an intellectual world, which he aſſumes, in the dull mirror of his own mind; of which he knows little more than this, that it is both dull and narrow? Can he be leſs than mad, who perſeveres dogmatically in this pretenſion, whilſt he is obliged to own that he arrives with many helps, much pains, and by ſlow degrees, to a little imperfect knowledge of the viſible world which he inhabits, and concerning which he is therefore ſober and modeſt enough to reaſon hypothetically? In a word, can he be leſs than mad, who boaſts a revelation ſuperadded to reaſon, to ſupply the defects of it, and who ſuperadds reaſon to revelation, to ſupply the defects of this too, at the ſame time? This is madneſs, or there is no ſuch thing incident to our nature: and into this kind of madneſs the greateſt genii have been the moſt apt to fall. A St. Paul, profound in cabaliſtical learning; a St. Austin, deep read in Plato; a father Malebranche, and a biſhop of Cloyne. Elevation of genius makes them giddy: and theſe men, like thoſe who are born

born in the purple, imagine they can do every thing they have a mind to do, becauſe they can do more than others. The miſtake has been fatal to both; to theſe heroes in philoſophy, as well as to the others. Tho all men are not placed on the ſame level, there is a level above which no man can riſe: and he, who compares the nature of his mind with the nature of things, will be ſure to find it.

I HAVE now thrown upon paper all that occurs to my preſent thoughts, or all that I have leiſure to digeſt and extend, of what has been thrown out in many converſations concerning the folly and preſumption of philoſophers, the riſe and progreſs of their boaſted ſcience, the propagation of error and ſuperſtition, and the partial attempts that have been made to reform the abuſes of human reaſon. It has amuſed me in writing, I wiſh it may amuſe you in reading, and be of inſtruction to us both. Regular treatiſes and complete ſyſtems you do not expect from me: nor ſhould you have them, if I had a much higher opinion of my own capacity than I have. My ſuperiors in knowledge and parts would do better perhaps, if even they were content to write eſſays, that they might improve, correct, or reject, as I am always ready to do, on farther obſervation, reflection, and information. In the mean time, what has been now ſaid may be ſufficient, as I think, to eſtabliſh the general propoſition, that there would be more real knowledge, and more true wiſdom among mankind, if there was leſs learning, and leſs philoſophy.

POST-

POSTSCRIPT

TO THE

SECOND ESSAY.

HAVING obſerved, in the foregoing eſſay, how abſurdly and preſumptuouſly philoſophers reaſon upon a ſuppoſed analogy of the human with the divine mind, whilſt they ſcorn to look downwards, and to obſerve the real analogy that there is between the mind or ſoul of the whole animal kind, the human ſpecies included; it has come into my thoughts to add the reflections that follow as relative to the ſame ſubject.

You may ſee in TULLY *, that the ſtoics, who obſerved the internal and external conſtitutions of men to be very differently affected according to the different climates, concluded from thence, that there were creatures of more ſublime natures in purer air, and filled unknown ſpaces with theſe unknown inhabitants. I am far from embracing this hypotheſis; but it ſeems to me, that there is a probability ſufficient to force our aſſent to another, which has prevailed leſs, becauſe it is founded on a degree of aſtronomical knowledge that few perſons have now, or had antiently; whereas the former is a mere wild aſſumption of imagination. The hypotheſis I mean, is that which we find in the coſmotheoros of Mr. HUYGENS, and from which FONTENELLE has borrowed the materials of his pretty book of the plurality of worlds. Tho I give this hypotheſis

* Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

ſo

ſo modern an original, becauſe it is beſt known and ſufficient for my purpoſe, I am not ignorant that it had been advanced before, and that ORPHEUS, as well as Mr. HUYGENS, peopled the planets. We have reaſon to think he did, by thoſe verſes which PROCLUS has preſerved, and in which the thracian bard ſpeaks of houſes and cities in the moon. But how old or how new ſoever this hypotheſis may be, it aſſumes, you know, that the planets of our ſolar ſyſtem, and the ſame may be aſſumed of thoſe of a multitude of other ſolar ſyſtems, which the immenſity of the univerſe contains, are worlds that have an analogy with ours, and the habitations of animals that have an analogy with us. The analogy muſt be, no doubt, very remote, in ſuch a vaſt variety of poſitions, conſtitutions, and laws of nature: but ſtill there may be, and there are very probably, relations both phyſical and moral between all theſe numberleſs worlds and ſyſtems of worlds, as between various parts of one ſtupendous whole, and the habitations of ten thouſand times ten thouſand millions of intellectual corporeal beings, who live, like us, under the providence, general or particular, of the incomprehenſible Creator of all things.

SHALL we be ſo abſurd and ſo impertinent now as to imagine, that all theſe creatures of God, tho corporeal like men, are confined to the ſame degree of intelligence, or even to the ſame manner of knowing? Or rather than believe that they are in theſe, and perhaps in other reſpects, ſuperior to us, ſhall we aſſert that there are no ſuch beings, and deny that they exiſt, tho we diſcover ſome of their habitations? Philoſophers who lived before the invention of microſcopes, might have aſſerted juſt as well, that the "minima naturae," imperceptible by their minuteneſs, as theſe beings by their diſtance, did not exiſt. We cannot diſcern a gradation of beings in other planets by the help of teleſcopes, as we obſerve ſuch a gra-

a gradation by the help of microſcopes in our own; but the gradation of ſenſe and intelligence in our own, from animal to animal, and of intelligence, principally, up to man, as well as the very abrupt manner, if I may ſay ſo, in which this evidently unfiniſhed intellectual ſyſtem ſtops at the human ſpecies, gives great reaſon to believe, that this gradation is continued upwards in other ſyſtems, as we perceive it to be continued downwards in ours. We may well ſuſpect that ours is the loweſt, in this reſpect, of all mundane ſyſtems; ſince the rational is ſo nearly connected, as it is here, with the irrational: and there may be as much difference between ſome other creature of God, without having recourſe to angels and archangels, and man, as there is between a man and an oiſter.

We are not able to conceive any manner of knowing, which we have not: and yet certain it is, that there may be many ſuch. But even if we aſſume arbitrarily, that there is no other manner of knowing, as thoſe prophane divines do who confine that of God himſelf to knowledge by ideas; yet will it be ſtill evident, that other creatures of God may enjoy the ſame faculties that we have in a more perfect manner. It is eaſy to conceive, for inſtance, that there may be animals whoſe ſenſes can penetrate the inmoſt conſtitutions of ſubſtances, and who, having ideas of their real eſſences, know the firſt general principles and cauſes, where we know nothing more than ſome particular effects. There may be minds wherein ideas and notions once received or framed, never fade nor vary. Such minds may diſcern, at one glance, and by immediate intuition, the agreement or repugnancy of all their ideas and notions. The ſolution of the moſt difficult problem may be to them as eaſy, as the compariſon which ſhews the equality of twice two to four is to us. In a word, there may be, and it implies no contradiction to ſuppoſe that there are, creatures in other ſyſtems

of animal being tempered with finer clay, caſt in nobler moulds, than the human, and animated by ſpirits more ſubtile and volatile than ours, whatever theirs or ours are. It were to be wiſhed that philoſophers, who are ſo intent on the leaſt probable hypotheſes, would contemplate this, and would compare the manifeſt imperfections of their own nature with the poſſible, nay probable, excellencies of other animal natures. They might avoid one extreme into which they are apt to fall, by looking down on inferior beings; and another, by looking up at ſuperior. This double view would teach them neither to undervalue human nature, as ſome have done; nor to over-rate it, which is the folly of more.

WHAT has been here ſaid concerning the intelligent inhabitants of other planets is purely hypothetical. It can paſs for nothing more. But I am ſure that it is much more conſiſtent, and more conceivable than the other ſyſtem, which prevails in our days, as it did in thoſe of old. The ſyſtem of an intellectual world, a world of immaterial ideas and of ſpiritual natures. Neither is it liable to have ſuch abſurd notions and practices grafted upon it, as have been grafted on the other. The inconſiſtency of maintaining, like PYTHAGORAS, that the human ſoul is a portion of the Deity, "particula divinae aurae," and, at the ſame time, that there are other ſpiritual beings between God and man; or like St. AUSTIN, that there is no mind exiſtent between the human and the ſupreme mind, "nec ulla natura interpoſita," and, at the ſame time, that there are intelligences ſuperior to man, and inferior to God; the inconſiſtency of theſe opinions, I ſay, is equal, and equally obvious. But on the other hand, to deny, that there is any affinity between the ſupreme and created intelligences is very conſiſtent with this aſſumption, that the chain of intelligence from man upwards, thro many orders of created intellectual beings,

beings, is immeaſurably long; tho the uppermoſt link of this chain is not ſuppoſed to be faſtened to the throne of infinite wiſdom, nor to be nearer to it than the lowermoſt. Again: Since our planet is inhabited by corporeal intellectual beings, the hypotheſis that aſſumes the other planets to be ſo likewiſe, is much more conceivable, than that of legions of angels, of daemons and genii, and of pure and impure ſpirits, which pagan theology invented, and Jews and Chriſtians adopted. Whether we ſuppoſe theſe beings immaterial, according to the preſent mode of opinion; or whether we ſuppoſe them, as the antients both heathens and Chriſtians did generally, to be fine material ſubſtances, like that whereof they made the human ſoul, or wherewith they thought proper to cloath it in it's ſeparate ſtate, and of which TULLY ſays in his tuſculans, "tanta "ejus tenuitas, ut fugiat aciem;" whichever we ſuppoſe, this hypotheſis ſtands on no other foundation, philoſophically ſpeaking, than that of a mere poſſible exiſtence, of ſuch ſpirits as are admitted for divers theological uſes. The other hypotheſis is founded on what we know of actual exiſtence. We are led to it by a plain, direct, and unforced analogy. We know that there are habitations: and we aſſume that they are inhabited.

THE firſt might appear plauſible, as it did in thoſe ages when poets and philoſophers, as well as the vulgar, imagined that the Supreme Being who ſpoke, to uſe a common expreſſion, and the univerſe was made, and every act of whoſe will is ſufficient to deſtroy it again, ſtood in need, like ſome earthly monarch, of miniſters to attend his throne, of meſſengers to convey, and of troops to execute his orders: when they looked on the viſible world, as on a great palace whoſe floor was the earth, and whoſe ceiling or upper ſtory was the ſky *,

* Cujus coelum laquear, et terra pavimentum.

and when, in conſequence of ſuch fantaſtical notions, they ſuppoſed the upper ſtory, or heaven, to be the habitation of gods, and of other celeſtial perſons, as the lower ſtory, or earth, was that of men. But it is time that theſe wild imaginations ſhould have no longer any place in the firſt philoſophy. As far as revelation realiſes and ſanctifies them, they muſt be employed by the divine: and he has in revelation a ſufficient authority for employing them. The philoſopher, whoſe object is natural theology, has not the ſame; becauſe the reality of ſuch exiſtences cannot be deduced from any knowledge he has of nature, and becauſe he cannot be juſtified in going beyond the bounds which this knowledge preſcribes. Faith and reaſon, revealed and natural knowledge, ought to be always diſtinguiſhed; leſt one ſhould be confined, and the other extended too much: and divines and philoſophers ſhould keep in their diſtinct provinces.

Thus they proceed, for the moſt part, in matters of natural philoſophy. The modern philoſophers, tho very good Chriſtians, communicate the wonderful diſcoveries that have been made in corporeal nature, and concerning the true ſyſtem of the univerſe, without any regard to their repugnancy to the moſaic hiſtory of the creation, and to almoſt all the notions of the ſacred penmen, which were plainly thoſe of an ignorant people and unphiloſophical ages. When ſuch of theſe philoſophers, as are divines, endeavour to reconcile to philoſophical truth theſe apparent contradictions to it, they do but ſhake the authority of the ſcriptures, and ſhew moſt evidently how neceſſary it is to keep theology and philoſophy each on it's proper bottom, and to avoid at leaſt, by comparing theſe different ſyſtems, to demonſtrate that they are irreconcileable. St. Austin and others paid, as divines, no regard to coſmography, and flatly denied the antipodes. The inquiſitors at Rome denied

denied that GALILEI ſaw what he ſaid he ſaw, and puniſhed him very conſequentially for ſaying that he ſaw it. Several divines follow the ſame method. They enter into coſmographical diſquiſitions no more than St. AUSTIN, nor into aſtronomical any more than the roman inquiſitors, but content themſelves to take the hiſtory of the creation according to the literal and obvious ſenſe, as they find it related in the book of Geneſis, and as they would take any other journal or hiſtorical relation. They who have done otherwiſe, and have found, upon trial, that this relation, thus underſtood, could not be reconciled to nature, reaſon, philoſophy, nor natural theology, for natural theology teaches us to think of God in a manner very oppoſite to the ideas which MOSES gives of the Supreme Being and of his operations, have made uſe of two expedients little favorable to the moſaic hiſtory: for ſome have aſſumed it to be in this part wholly mythological, and others, unable to wreſt natural philoſophy into an agreement with it, have ſo wreſted the text into a ſeeming agreement with their philoſophical theories, as to make it plain that this text may be applied to any hypotheſis, with ſome ingenuity, a ſkill in languages, and a knowledge of antiquity. —— But I ſtop here, a digreſſion that might carry me inſenſibly a great way, and that was intended only to ſhew, that ſince men have not admitted, in favor of revelation, a ſyſtem of phyſics that is inconſiſtent with philoſophical truth, there is no reaſon for admitting, in favor of the ſame revelation, a ſyſtem of pneumatics, that is ſo too: whereas an hypotheſis that has ſome foundations of probability in natural philoſophy may be admitted, for this reaſon by the philoſopher, and even by the divine for another reaſon; becauſe it is not inconſiſtent with revelation. If it be ſaid that the pneumatical ſyſtem, which eſtabliſhes ſo many orders of ſpiritual beings, is not inconſiſtent with any knowledge that we have of nature; that it is properly a ſyſtem,

becauſe

becauſe it is eſtabliſhed on revealed authority; and that if we conſider it in a philoſophical light alone, and merely as an hypotheſis, it is better founded than the other; ſince we may aſſume, that there is a world of ſpirits, from what we know of our own ſpirit by a more direct and eaſy analogy than that by which we aſſume, that the planets are inhabited by corporeal intelligent animals: if this be ſaid, the anſwer is obvious and deciſive. That there are ſuch ſpiritual beings, as the authority of revelation is brought to prove, may not be inconſiſtent with ſome philoſophical truths, but is ſo with others. Let it be, that any knowledge we have of natural philoſophy does not contradict this ſyſtem, yet is it ſuſpicious to the firſt philoſophy, becauſe unneceſſary; and inconſiſtent with it, becauſe the reaſons for the generation, to ſpeak like the heathen, or the creation, to ſpeak like Jews and Chriſtians, of this unneceſſary world of ſpirits, the ſuppoſed manner of their exiſtence, and the uſes to which they are put, or ſuffered to put themſelves, with a multitude of other circumſtances, ſtand in oppoſition to ſeveral truths of the firſt philoſophy or natural theology, and have ſerved only to promote polytheiſm, ſuperſtition, and idolatry. Theſe dogmas then, for if they are revealed they ceaſe to be hypotheſes, muſt be ſolely maintained on the authority of the ſcriptures.

If the divine keeps on that ground, he cannot be defeated. He may own his inability to anſwer the objections, and to ſolve the difficulties oppoſed to him; or may refuſe more prudently ſtill to give any attention to philoſophical reaſonings, by urging, that a time will come, a time appointed of the father, when every knot will be untied, and every ſeeming repugnancy of reaſon to revelation will be reconciled: and that he is contented, as the philoſopher ought to be, to wait for that time. The rabbi might defer his anſwer till Elias comes: the Chriſtian

ſtian till the Meſſias comes in his glory, and till the conſummation of things. In the mean while, a ſort of truce ſhould take place between the divine and the philoſopher. The former ſhould forbear the vain attempt of bending reaſon to ſupport revelation in this caſe, which is often done in many others, and almoſt always with notable prejudice to the latter. The philoſopher ſhould forbear to invade the province of the divine, on this condition; and ſhould content himſelf to aſſert and promote natural theology, without oppoſing it to ſupernatural. Both of them might thus concur in receiving the hypotheſis of planetary worlds, which does not require to be contraſted with the other, nor ſhould have been ſo by me, if I had not thought it neceſſary to ſhew at the ſame time, that there are probably finite created intelligences vaſtly ſuperior to the human, and that there is however no ſuch gradation of intelligent beings, as raiſes the moſt elevated of them a jot nearer to the ſupreme intelligence than the loweſt. I oppoſe this theological ſyſtem, and I defend the philoſophical hypotheſis, the rather, becauſe by theſe means we may combat the pride and preſumption of metaphyſicians in two moſt flagrant inſtances, in the aſſumption of a gradation of the ſame intelligence and knowledge from man to God, as I have ſaid already, and in that by which man is made the final cauſe of the whole creation; for if the planets of our ſolar ſyſtem are worlds inhabited like ours, and if the fixed ſtars are other ſuns about which other planets revolve, the celeſtial phaenomena were no more made for us than we for them. That noble ſcene of the univerſe, which modern philoſophy has opened, gives ample room for all the planetary inhabitants, whom it leads, and even conſtrains us to ſuppoſe. Where the ſpirits of the other ſyſtem reſide was a queſtion eaſily anſwered, when ſuperſtition and hypotheſis made up the ſum of theology and philoſophy. But it is not ſo eaſy to be anſwered now. Are the good and pure ſpirits in heaven? But where

where is heaven? Is it beyond all the ſolar ſyſtems of the univerſe? Or is it, like the intermundia of EPICURUS, in expanſes between them? Are the evil and impure ſpirits in hell? But where is hell? Is it in the center of any one planet for every ſyſtem? Or is it in the center of every planet? Do others wander in air? or reſide latent in every element? Are they confined inviſibly, like thoſe that the Chineſe imagine, to certain countries and cities, to rivers and lakes, to woods and mountains? Or is it their employment to attend on particular men, the guardian angels of ſome, or the devils and the tempters of others; for temptation is aſcribed to the evil ſpirits ſtill, tho poſſeſſion is ſo no longer, I think, out of Spain and Portugal, and other countries, where religious ignorance prevails as much as in them, if any ſuch there are?——Tantum——

ESSAY

ESSAY THE THIRD:

Containing some further REFLECTIONS

On the RISE and PROGRESS of

MONOTHEISM,

That first and great Principle of NATURAL THEOLOGY,

OR

The FIRST PHILOSOPHY.

ESSAY THE THIRD.

SECTION I.

I HAD finiſhed the laſt eſſay before I recollected, that there was ſomething in Mr. Locke's diſcourſe concerning the reaſonableneſs of chriſtianity, very repugnant to what I have advanced about the knowledge of the one true God, and to what I ſhall have occaſion to ſay, on another occaſion, about the ignorance of natural religion, under which it is ſuppoſed that mankind labored before the coming of Chriſt. I ſhall not anticipate the ſecond point, but ſhall beſtow ſome more reflections on the firſt; in order to judge, whilſt the ſubject is freſh in my mind, whether I ought to retract any thing that I have ſaid to you in converſation, or that has fallen from my pen upon the ſubject. If it appears, on examination, that my notions are not ſo well founded in fact, and in reaſon, as thoſe of this great man in the preſent caſe, I ſhall ſubmit with pleaſure to an authority, that I reſpect extremely in all caſes; and if it appears that they are better founded than his in both, one uſeful leſſon will be the reſult of this examination. We ſhall learn how unſafe it is to take for granted any thing, in matters eſpecially which concern, or which are thought to concern, religion, that we have not ourſelves examined, and how inexcuſable it is to do this in caſes wherein we may be able, with a little pains, to judge for ourſelves.

The firſt article of natural theology, in which the heathen were deficient, according to Mr. Locke, was the knowledge of one God, maker of all things. He admits, at the ſame

time, that the works of nature, in every part of them, ſufficiently evidenced a deity; and that, by the impreſſions of himſelf, God was eaſy to be found. Theſe aſſertions do not ſeem very conſiſtent, and therefore it is added, that the world made ſo little uſe of their reaſon, that they ſaw him not---- ſenſe and luſt blinded their minds. But the rational, and thinking part of mankind, he confeſſes, found the one ſupreme, inviſible God, when they ſought after him. If this be true now, as it is moſt certainly, the heathen world made as good uſe of their reaſon, for ought I can ſee, as the chriſtian world. In this, it is not the irrational and unthinking, but the rational and thinking part of mankind who ſeek, and find the true God; and juſt ſo we are told, that it was in the other. Beſides, if this be true, it follows, that this great and fundamental article of natural theology is diſcoverable by a due uſe of human reaſon; and Mr. Locke acknowledges accordingly again, that God was found by the wiſe and virtuous, which is a limitation of no great ſignificancy to his purpoſe, ſince the vicious would have ſought him in no ſtate of mankind, nor the fooliſh have found him. But ſays this writer, the wiſe and virtuous had never authority enough to prevail on the multitude, and to perſuade the ſocieties of men, that there was but one God. If he had proved, as well as affirmed this, he would only have proved, what no man denies, that ſufficient means to reclaim men from polytheiſm and idolatry, and to eſtabliſh the belief of one God, appear to have been wanting in general, and to a great degree, as far as the memorials we have of antient nations can ſhew. He would not have proved, that the light of nature was inſufficient, nor that the religion of nature was defective in this reſpect. He would not have proved, what he had in view to eſtabliſh, that the belief and worſhip of one God was the national religion of the Iſraelites alone, and that it was their particular privilege, and advantage, to know the

true

true God, and the true worſhip of him; whilſt all other nations, from the beginning, adored the hoſt of heaven, as EUSEBIUS aſſerts very confidently, tho he is far from proving it.

EUSEBIUS took much pains, and uſed much art, I might ſay artifice, to ſpread an opinion that this knowledge, and all good theology were derived from the Jews, and from their ſcriptures; nay that the philology, and philoſophy of the whole learned world were purloined from thence, and the heathen were plagiaries, who lighted their candles at the fire of the ſanctuary, as ſome modern EUSEBIUS or other, GALE, I think, expreſſes himſelf. JOSEPHUS had gone before EUSEBIUS in the ſame deſign: for thus far Jews and Chriſtians made their cauſe common, and he had begun to falſify chronology, that he might give his nation a ſurpriſing antiquity. EUSEBIUS did the ſame, and without taking the trouble of deſcending into particulars, many of which are acknowledged by learned and orthodox writers, I may ſay, that from that time to this, or to the time when by the revival of letters, and the invention of printing, which made the knowledge of antiquity more eaſy and common, much the ſame practice was continued with much the ſame ſucceſs. Antient memorials have been forged and altered for this particular purpoſe, mere aſſumptions have been delivered as facts, and nothing has been neglected to give not only antiquity, but illuſtration, to a nation that never had much of the latter out of their own writings, and thoſe of chriſtianity. As the hiſtory of the Jews was committed to the care of their ſcribes; ſo the propagation of every learned ſyſtem that could tend to the confirmation of it, by reconciling anachroniſms, and by coloring improbabilities, has been the charge of a particular order of men among Chriſtians, who had the monopoly of learning for many ages,

and

and who have had a great ſhare of it ſince. This has been impoſed on the bulk of mankind, prepared by their prejudices to acquieſce under the authority of great names, and frightened from examining by the enormous piles of greek, and latin, and eaſtern languages, in which ſuch authors ſeem to entrench themſelves.

NOTWITHSTANDING this, I will ſay, and, if I know any thing, I ſay it on knowledge, that theſe entrenchments are not tenable. They cannot be battered down always, perhaps, by the ſame arms by which they are defended, but ſure I am they may be undermined, and he who ſearches their foundations will find that they are laid on ſand. JOSEPHUS, and EUSEBIUS will be of great uſe to him, againſt themſelves. Their writings are repertories of valuable fragments, and of ſuch as would be more ſo, if more credit could be given to the fidelity of thoſe who cite them. I have ſometimes thought, that we might apply properly enough to the jew, and the chriſtian author, what LA BRUYERE ſays, in his characters, of PERAULT, that he quoted ſo many paſſages from antient writers, whilſt he attempted to prove the ſuperiority of the moderns, that his works were read for the ſake of theſe paſſages.

THINKING in this manner, I could not fail to be ſurpriſed when I found ſuch aſſertions, as are mentioned above, in a treatiſe writ by Mr. LOCKE. The common herd of writers copy one another in every point that makes for their common cauſe, about which alone, and not about truth, they ſeem to be concerned. They affirm over and over ſo poſitively, and ſo long, things deſtitute of proof, or evident falſities, that even the laſt grow into belief, according to the practice of the court of Rome, as father PAUL repreſents it, in her uſurpations. I ſhould not have eaſily ſuſpected Mr. LOCKE of ſuch a proceeding, nor of affirm-

affirming dogmatically what he had not ſufficiently examined. But he has writ below himſelf in this inſtance, by going out of his way, and has aſſumed the ſpirit of thoſe who write on the ſame ſubject, much like Sir ISAAC NEWTON, who loſt himſelf in the vague probabilities of chronology, after having purſued with ſo much ſucceſs the certainty of mathematical demonſtration.

I MEDDLE not here with any thing that is ſaid concerning that clear knowledge of their duty, which was wanting to mankind, as Mr. LOCKE affirms very untruly, before the coming of Chriſt, nor with the theological part of this treatiſe. I confine myſelf to theſe propoſitions, that all the heathen were in a ſtate of darkneſs, and ignorance of the true God, and conſequently that the belief and worſhip of one God was the national religion of the Iſraelites alone. Now here I obſerve a want of that preciſion, which this great man is ſo careful to keep in all his other writings. As he does not diſtinguiſh enough the want of a ſufficient knowledge of natural religion, and the want of ſufficient means to propagate it, which he rather confounds in all he ſays about them, ſo he uſes theſe two expreſſions, the true God, and one God, as if they were exactly ſynonymous; whereas they are not really ſo, and the explanation, and juſtification of the diſtinction, in the preſent diſpute, will ſet the matter on a very different foot. It is not unity alone that conſtitutes the complex idea, or notion of the true God. There is, there can be but one ſuch Being, and yet a monotheiſt may be as far from the knowledge of the true God as the rankeſt, and moſt ſuperſtitious polytheiſt. I have taken notice, in the precedent eſſay, how the belief of one God, and of many, was reconciled in the heathen theology ſeveral ways; and what I have touched tranſiently, may be ſeen made out fully in the intellectual ſyſtem. A polytheiſt, who

who believes one ſelf-exiſtent Being, the fountain of all exiſtence, by whoſe immediate or communicated energy all things were made, and are governed, and who looks on all thoſe other beings whom he calls gods, that is, beings ſuperior to man, not only as inferior to the Supreme, but as beings all of whom proceed from him in ſeveral ſubordinate ranks, and are appointed by him to the various uſes and ſervices for which he deſigned them in the whole extent of the divine oeconomy; ſuch a polytheiſt, I ſay, will approach nearly to true theiſm, by holding in this manner nothing that is abſolutely inconſiſtent with it: whilſt the monotheiſt, who believes that there is but one God, and aſcribes to this God, whom he ſhould conceive as an all-perfect Being, the very worſt of human imperfections, is moſt certainly ignorant of the true God, and as oppoſite to true theiſm as the atheiſt, nay he is more injuriouſly ſo. Mr. LOCKE would have done like himſelf, if he had made theſe reflections before he had joined in the common cry; and he might have thought, perhaps, in that caſe, that the coming of CHRIST was neceſſary to give the Jews true notions of God, as well as to convince the Gentiles of his unity.

INSTEAD of this, he takes the common opinion for granted, ſuppoſes what is in queſtion, and does not ſo much as attempt a proof. He ſays indeed, that "there was no part of mankind "——— that had a greater light of reaſon, or that followed it "farther in all ſorts of ſpeculations, than the Athenians; and "yet we find, he adds, but one SOCRATES amongſt them that "oppoſed and laughed at their polytheiſm ——— and we ſee "how they rewarded him for it." He quotes in the ſame place the reproach that St. PAUL made to this people. "Ye men "of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too ſuperſti-"tious, for as I paſſed by, and beheld your devotions, I found "an altar with this inſcription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." If theſe

theſe were meant for proofs of what he aſſerts, they were unluckily choſen. Matter of fact is miſtaken in one, and in neither of them is there the leaſt color of argument. SOCRATES was ſo far from oppoſing the religious worſhip eſtabliſhed at Athens, that he held it to be the duty of every citizen to follow the religion eſtabliſhed by the laws of his city, as we know upon good authority, that of XENOPHON; and if we turn to the Euthyphro in PLATO, we ſhall find him declaring, in his zeal for polytheiſm, againſt all the traditions which he judged to be unworthy of the gods, tho they were believed, and reſpected by the vulgar. This was his crime. He neither oppoſed, nor laughed at polytheiſm, tho he certainly believed the unity of the Supreme Being. But the zeal of bigots in thoſe days, as in ours, made it no leſs criminal to reject the abuſes of religion, than to profeſs atheiſm; and a faction in the ſtate took advantage of this, to put him to death.

BUT if we ſuppoſe, for argument ſake, that he was put to death for oppoſing and laughing at polytheiſm, and idolatry; if the Athenians were ſuperſtitious, as they were undoubtedly, and if they dedicated an altar to the unknown God, what will all this ſerve to prove? It will prove only that men are apt, and even the moſt judicious ſometimes, to erect their ſcanty knowledge of a few particulars into a ſuppoſed general, and certain knowledge of any ſubject. A little tract of land paſſes with them for the whole world, two or three nations for all mankind, and two or three thouſand years for all antiquity. Are we able to compare the Athenians very exactly in this reſpect, or in any other, with the people who floriſhed at the ſame time, and of whom we have ſome accounts in hiſtory, and tradition? How much leſs are we able to compare them with ſo many other nations, of whom not ſo much as the names are come down to us, or were known to them? What

argument then can be drawn from the polytheiſm, idolatry, and ſuperſtition of this little ſtate, to that of the whole world, which is the point to be proved? or from the Athenians in the days of SOCRATES, or St. PAUL, even to the Athenians themſelves in the ages whereof the prieſts of Sais talked to SOLON: nay to the whole race of mankind in theſe, and ſtill more antient ages; for even theſe were not deemed the firſt?

I MIGHT leave the argument here, ſince the author of the reaſonableneſs of chriſtianity offers no other proofs of the facts he advances. But I think my ſelf obliged to juſtify my opinion ſo contrary to his, and to that of the whole crowd of ſcholars, on whoſe authority he reſts. Great men take great liberties, and expect to be believed on their words, and the diſciples of Mr. LOCKE have as good a right, as the diſciples of any philoſopher, to uſe the αὐτὸς ἔφη. But for me, who cannot allow it to any in matters which I am able to examine, and who ſhould think myſelf obliged to give my reaſons even for agreeing with him in all ſuch matters, it ſeems ſtill more incumbent upon me to give thoſe which induce me to differ from him; and I ſhall do ſo, without repeating much of what has been ſaid by me already.

I HAVE ſaid in the former eſſay, and I have given my reaſons for it, that I do not believe mankind diſcerned the unity of God in the firſt dawnings of knowledge. But the impreſſions of the Creator are ſo ſtrongly marked in the whole extent of the creation, and the idea of an all-wiſe, and all-powerful Being, firſt cauſe of all things, is ſo proportionable to human reaſon, that it muſt have been received into the minds of men as ſoon as they began to contemplate the face of nature, and to exerciſe their reaſon in ſuch contemplations; and this was long before the commencement of any traditions that we find out of the books

books of MOSES. Prophane memorials ſhew us the whole world, and ſacred memorials except the patriarchs, and the Iſraelites alone out of this dark ſcene, involved in polytheiſm, ſuperſtition, and idolatry. But ſtill, both ſacred and prophane concur in ſhewing us ſome gleams of light that break thro theſe clouds, ſome notices of the knowledge, and worſhip of the true God, that were kept up among the ſons of men. They appear faintly, and very imperfect they were in theſe times, perhaps, early to us, tho late with reſpect to the beginning of our mundane, and human ſyſtem. But ſtill they appear, and give us ſufficient reaſon to collect from their appearances, much more than they ſhew us immediately.

IT is ſtrange to obſerve how unwilling eccleſiaſtical writers and divines are to admit this truth; and it is often provoking to obſerve that they, who have no more pretence to be believed about their own religion, than the heathen writers about theirs, preſume to contradict what the latter of theſe affirm about their faith, in oppoſition to the invectives of chriſtian writers, tho they appeal to the antient doctors of paganiſm whom they do not appear to have interpolated, nor under whoſe names there is no pretence to ſay that they have impoſed any ſpurious books on the world; both which accuſations are evidently true of our chriſtian writers in the firſt, and, as we commonly ſay, the pureſt ages of chriſtianity. It is ſtranger ſtill to obſerve how little regard the ſame perſons pay, upon this head, even to the opinions of the greateſt ſaints, and moſt learned men of their own church. I could quote many inſtances. Let one ſuffice. It ſhall be taken from St. AUSTIN, who anſwering a paſſage of FAUSTUS the manichaean *, wherein he makes the belief of one Supreme Being the common badge of pagans, Jews, and Chriſtians, does not allow indeed that the Chriſtians

* Lib. 20.

took the opinion of a divine monarchy from the heathens, but is forced to allow that theſe were not ſo given up to falſe gods, as to loſe the belief of the one true God, from whom every kind of nature proceeds *.

THE polytheiſm, ſuperſtition, and idolatry of Egypt appear ſo monſtrous in the light in which we view them, that they furniſh the principal topics of every declamation againſt the theology of paganiſm; and yet I perſuade my ſelf, that the knowledge and worſhip of God in his unity, had prevailed even there in times unknown to us. Let it be conſidered that the Greeks, thro whom all our prophane anecdotes concerning this country have been conveyed, were not much acquainted with it, nor had reſorted to it in ſearch of knowledge till the reign of PSAMMITICHUS, that is, till ſeventeen or eighteen centuries after the eſtabliſhment of this monarchy, dating this eſtabliſhment only from MENES, and bringing him down as low as he is dragged by MARSHAM. THALES, SOLON, and PYTHAGORAS went thither nearly about the ſame time, in the reign of CROESUS at ſooneſt; or in that of CAMBYSES at lateſt. By this chronology it appears, that an immenſe ſpace of time, ſufficient for many revolutions in religion and government, was elapſed before the Greeks had the means of being well informed about either; and the antiquities of Egypt might be as obſcurely, and imperfectly ſeen by theſe firſt philoſophers, who went thither, as the greek antiquities are by us. We may puſh this conſideration farther, and ſuppoſe that the ſame polytheiſm, ſuperſtition, and idolatry that they found eſtabliſhed in Egypt, were eſtabliſhed there in the time of ORPHEUS, ſix or ſeven hundred years before, or even in the time of CECROPS, CADMUS, DANAÜS, or ERECTHEUS, who are ſaid to have carried

* —— Gentes non uſque adeo ad falſos deos eſſe dilapſas, ut opinionem amitterent unius veri Dei, ex quo eſt omnis qualiſcunque natura.

colonies,

colonies, letters, and civil inſtitutions into Greece two or three hundred years ſooner than ORPHEUS carried religious rites and myſteries thither: and there will remain ſtill behind all theſe events, an antiquity more than ſufficient for one revolution in theological opinions, and in religious worſhip at leaſt, and perhaps for more than one.

I AM willing to grant more than EUSEBIUS, or any one elſe has proved, and yet this conceſſion will only thruſt the aera of egyptian polytheiſm and idolatry back into a greater antiquity. It will not give any grounds to aſſert, like EUSEBIUS, that the Egyptians were polytheiſts, and idolaters, or profeſſed a ſort of religious atheiſm from the beginning, nor that the Iſraelites alone knew, and worſhipped the true God. It may lead us perhaps to opinions very oppoſite to theſe, and much better founded on prophane, for I ſhall not yet conſider the ſacred authority that is alledged for them, and that is more ſo in appearance than in reality. The more antient the eſtabliſhment of polytheiſm and idolatry in Egypt is agreed to have been, the ſtronger the argument grows, that may be drawn from thoſe notices that we have in our moſt authentic accounts of egyptian theology, of a purer faith and worſhip. The belief of one ſupreme, inviſible, and incomprehenſible Being, Creator of all things, muſt have been once firmly ſettled in the minds of that people, when ſo many ages of prevalent polytheiſm and idolatry were not able to root it out, nor to efface the traces of the worſhip of him. Public profeſſion, and practice, the outward ſyſtem of religion, was altered, and the purity of it corrupted many ways, and by different motives. But nothing except conviction could have preſerved, from time immemorial, in the ſecret theology, or inward doctrine of the Egyptians, this fundamental article of all true religion, the exiſtence of one Supreme Being, Creator, and Monarch of the univerſe, and this

this article was ſo preſerved. Whatever errors the Egyptians, or their ſcholars the Greeks, admitted into their theology, this opinion tinctured every theiſtical ſyſtem: and even they who held the world to be eternal, like ARISTOTLE and others, held the world, and the deified parts of it to be ſo, not as ſelf-exiſtent, but as eternal effects of an eternal cauſe. ARISTOTLE argues in his metaphyſics againſt the folly of ſuppoſing more principles than one, and nothing can be more expreſs than the doctrine of PLOTINUS on this point, where he diſtinguiſhes between priority in the order of time, and priority in the order of nature, and makes the world coaeval with God no otherwiſe, than as light is conceived to be coaeval with the ſun.

THE belief of one Supreme Being may appear the more evidently to have been that of the Egyptians, publicly profeſſed in the moſt antient times of that monarchy, and held at all times in their ſecret theology, from this conſideration, that it was brought from thence by the firſt of the Greeks, who went thither for inſtruction, and that the ſame doctrine was held by the laſt of thoſe who had ſtudied this philoſophy. THALES, and PYTHAGORAS, to ſay nothing of PLATO here, who came long after, brought it into Greece, diſguiſed indeed under hieroglyphical and myſtical repreſentations, but yet too plainly taught to be miſtaken for the contrary doctrine. ANAXAGORAS made a more public uſe of it by his writings, and has gone away with the honor of being the firſt of the Greeks who introduced a nous, or mind, into the coſmopoeia. But THALES was of the ſame opinion as ANAXAGORAS, and EUSEBIUS quotes very unfairly what this philoſopher ſaid of water, as of the firſt principle of all things, without making any mention of that intelligence who framed all things of water according to THALES *. This notion of a fluid chaos, which we know to have been very general, by PLUTARCH and by other autho-

* Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

rities,

rities, was very moſaical too, and points up to an egyptian original. The founder of the ionic ſect had it from thence moſt certainly, and MOSES too, if we give any credit to SIMPLICIUS, who ſcrupled not to declare, as I find him quoted by Dr. CUDWORTH, that the paſſages in the firſt of Geneſis about the creation of the world were taken from egyptian traditions. He called them fabulous, becauſe he was a zealous aſſerter of the eternity of the world. But his authority will not make them paſs for ſuch. MOSES, who had been inſtructed in all the wiſdom of the Egyptians, might believe them true upon much better grounds. Nay more, he might be directed, if you pleaſe, by inſpiration to take from them his belief of the beginning of things. Upon the whole, it is plain that the Supreme Being, the maker of the world, was acknowledged by the egyptian theology at the firſt period that has been mentioned.

To prove that the ſame doctrine was derived from the ſame ſource, by the laſt of thoſe who applied themſelves to the ſtudy of egyptian theology, I ſhall content my ſelf to bring JAMBLICUS forward; a very myſterious writer indeed, and yet plain enough to eſtabliſh what we contend for. He anſwers the queſtions PORPHYRY had aſked of ANEBO, under the name of ABAMMON the maſter of ANEBO. He was a Syrian, a very learned man, and much more capable, probably, than any Egyptian of that age to give a body of their divinity. Now we learn by the eighth ſection of the book he wrote on this occaſion, that the egyptian philoſophy ſuppoſed a multitude of eſſences, as they expreſſed themſelves, and a multitude of different principles of theſe eſſences, from whence I am apt to think, that PYTHAGORAS borrowed his numbers, and PLATO his ideas. They carried their inquiries beyond all the bounds of human knowledge, and they diſputed, as we do now, about words. But ſtill it is manifeſt, that theſe eſſences, or principles, were deemed

deemed ſubordinate to the firſt cauſe; for before them all, and before their firſt god and king the ſun, they acknowledged a Being, the fountain of all being, the root of all intelligible ideas. From this Being proceeded, according to this theology, "explicuit ſe" in GALE's tranſlation, that being who is his own father, ſufficient to himſelf, the God of gods, the father of eſſences from whom all exiſtence flows. This was the doctrine which MERCURIUS TRISMEGISTUS taught, and theſe were the principles he placed before the aetherial, empyreal, and celeſtial deities, concerning whom he wrote a great number of volumes. That this is a rhapſody of nonſenſe, I agree moſt readily. But it may not be leſs genuine for that, and it is ſufficient for my purpoſe; ſince it eſtabliſhes the unity of God even more preciſely, and leſs myſteriouſly than the Athanaſian creed.

THAT greek metaphyſical refinements helped to render the egyptian theology leſs intelligible, I ſhall not controvert; tho he muſt paſs for a dogmatical pedant, who preſumes to affirm, that they did ſo, and pretends to be a competent judge of the matter. But ſure I am, that the orthodoxy of it, in this great point, is better proved by this quotation from JAMBLICUS, than the ſuppoſed monſtrous heterodoxy of it by any authority EUSEBIUS brings to juſtify his charge. He affirms very poſitively, in the third book of his evangelical preparation, that no other gods, beſides the ſtars, were acknowledged even in the hidden theology of the Egyptians; that the creation of the univerſe was aſcribed to the viſible ſun alone, and all things depended, according to it, on fatal neceſſity, and on the influence of the ſtars, without the intervention of any incorporeal being, any efficient reaſon, God, gods, or inviſible intelligent natures. To maintain this ſtout aſſertion, he quotes a fragment of PORPHYRY's letter to ANEBO, and triumphs much in it, tho it makes nothing to his purpoſe. It proves that CHAEREMON, and ſome other

other writers had induced PORPHYRY to doubt concerning this article of the egyptian creed, and that he writ to his prieſt to be informed of the truth. CHAEREMON was an egyptian, and had been a prieſt, as ANEBO was; for neither the comic poet, nor any other of that name, can be the perſon intended, as it ſeems to me. PORPHYRY might poſſibly know nothing more of him. His authority, therefore, appeared ſufficient to make PORPHYRY inquire. But it was not ſufficient to make EUSEBIUS affirm, in flat contradiction to ſo many better authorities, and even to his own in other places. This CHAEREMON, I believe, was he who had accompanied AELIUS GALLUS in his voyage from Alexandria higher up into Egypt, and had been derided for his ignorance and arrogance by the whole company. STRABO had been one of this company, and EUSEBIUS had read the ſeventeenth book of his geography, without doubt, wherein an account is given of this important perſon. It is ſhameful, therefore, to ſee him quoted for the true notions of egyptian theology. There were ſome philoſophers and learned men in Egypt, very probably, in the time of CHAEREMON. But the colleges of thoſe antient philoſophers, under whom EUDOXUS and PLATO had ſtudied, were deſert; or if they remained, they were become ſeminaries of prieſts, who took care of ſacrifices, performed the other rites of ſuperſtition, exerciſed all the craft of their order, and took no pains to improve themſelves and others in knowledge. EUSEBIUS ſhould have remembered, that if CHAEREMON's authority was good againſt the Egyptians, it was of ſome force and weight againſt the Jews, which he would have been as unwilling to admit as JOSEPHUS, who accuſed CHAEREMON for this reaſon of impoſture, unleſs he had avowed in this caſe a maxim, which he and JOSEPHUS have done little elſe than avow in others, that the ſame teſtimony is good when it makes for them, and bad when it makes againſt them. EUSEBIUS ſhould have remembered, when he

derided the comment of PORPHYRY on the verſes attributed to ORPHEUS, and when he aſked how the author, whoever he was, could ſing of God, or mean that efficient mind that created the univerſe, who had never heard of any ſuch doctrine? He ſhould have remembered, I ſay, that he begged the queſtion, and ſuppoſed what he had not proved againſt the pagans.

IT has been obſerved already, that the unity of a Supreme Being muſt have been once a firſt principle of egyptian religion, ſince it pierced thro ſuch an immenſe ſeries of polytheiſm, ſuperſtition, and idolatry. Here we may obſerve to the ſame purpoſe, that all the metaphyſical and theological refinements of Egypt and Greece, were not able to remove this angular ſtone of true theiſm. When metaphyſics and theology are made ſciences, and theſe ſciences become the profeſſions of orders of men, who increaſe their conſideration in the world, or advance their temporal intereſts by creating an appearance of myſtery where there is none, or by increaſing it where it is, the ſimplicity of religion will be loſt of courſe, and natural theology will be transformed into artificial. We may find examples to confirm this truth in the chriſtian ſyſtem, and I much doubt whether the evangeliſts would underſtand the epiſtles of St. PAUL, tho one of them was his ſcribe, or St. PAUL the works of St. AUSTIN, tho the ſaint took ſo much of his theology from the apoſtle. This happened in the egyptian ſyſtem of religion; but this fundamental article, the unity of God, was preſerved, tho darkened and perplexed by the engraftments made upon it. Such were thoſe which may be found in PLATO, and in the latter platonicians; ſuch were thoſe which I have, and others which I might have cited from JAMBLICUS. But in all of them the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, the Being of beings, the God of gods, the fountain of

of all exiſtence, the root of all intelligible ideas, was acknowledged.

May one not think, without being too hypothetical, that we ſee in the anecdote Plutarch * relates concerning the belief and worſhip of the people of the theban dynaſty, the laſt ſtage of orthodox faith, and of natural religion in Egypt? They adored the one God eternal, inviſible, not like to any viſible objects, nor to be repreſented by them. I uſe Mr. Locke's words, for if he had intended to deſcribe this faith and worſhip from Plutarch, he could not have done it more exactly, and yet this is the deſcription of that God who was not known, according to him, till the light of the goſpel manifeſted him to the world. He might have aſſerted juſt as truly, that no men but the Jews knew how to read and write, before the coming of Chriſt, becauſe many of them knew it ill, as they do to this day, and ſome of them did not know it at all.

At what time the true God was thus publicly known and worſhiped in the upper Egypt, it is impoſſible to determine. But we ſee in the hiſtory aſcribed to Moses, that he was known in the lower Egypt, and the neighbouring country of the Chanaanites in the days of Abraham. The adventures of this patriarch and his ſon, when their wives were taken from them, are told in ſeveral chapters of Geneſis a little confuſedly, but however they ſerve to eſtabliſh this fact. No man, who reads the twentieth chapter of Geneſis, can doubt, whether it was the true God, or not, of whom the author meant to ſpeak, and who appeared to the firſt of the Abimelechs in his ſleep. It has been ſaid, I know, on this occaſion, that God manifeſted himſelf ſometimes to thoſe who were not in his alliance, or

* De Iside & Osiride.

covenant, but that he did this always for the ſake of his own people. He did it then, at this time, to preſerve SARAH's chaſtity. Be it ſo. But ſtill he manifeſted himſelf on this important occaſion. The king of Gerar knows him, and appeals to his juſtice. God is pleaſed to declare that the king's intentions were not criminal, and that he had therefore kept him from the commiſſion of the ſin, a very unneceſſary reſtraint, ſurely, ſince the king did not intend to commit it, ſince his intentions were not criminal. God commands, the king obeys, ABRAHAM intercedes, and ABIMELECH is reſtored to the power of begetting, and his wife and his concubines to the power of conceiving children. The ſame, or which is more likely, ſome other ABIMELECH had taken warning, and therefore as ſoon as he knew that REBECCA was the wife of ISAAC, he threatened death to any man, who ſhould preſume to lie with her, and bring ſo great a ſin on him, and his people. He followed ISAAC to Berſabea, and there this king, his miniſter, and his general deſired to make a ſolemn league with him, becauſe they knew that the Lord was with him *. The reaſon they gave, to induce him to conſent, was not only that they had done no hurt to him, nor his, but that they had ſent him from Gerar, with the bleſſing of the Lord †. Is the true God pointed more directly out any where in the ſame book? Do not the ABIMELECHS acknowledge him, and conduct themſelves, on this occaſion, as one of the patriarchs might have done.

MELCHISEDECH muſt not be forgot in this place. A thouſand idle gueſſes have been made, and various fables invented about him. St. PAUL, in his epiſtle to the Hebrews, ſhews great cabaliſtical ſkill on this ſubject, and grounds on ſuch forced alluſions as might paſs in the ſchool of GAMALIEL, the

* Tecum eſſe Dominum.

† Dimiſimus auctum benedictione Domini. Gen. vi. 26.

leaſt

leaſt concluſive reaſoning that was ever heard out of it. The book of Geneſis ſays little of this king and prieſt, but enough to ſhew, that the true God was known to others beſides the jewiſh line of patriarchs, and before the Iſraelites were a people. He was of egyptian race, as ſome have aſſerted without any grounds, I believe, of hiſtory or tradition, but not without an air at leaſt of probability. In all caſes, he was prieſt of the moſt high God, as well as king of Salem. As ſuch he bleſſed ABRAHAM; as ſuch the father of the faithful received his bleſſing; as ſuch he paid him the tithes of his plunder, which is a title, by the way, for carrying the divine right of tithes farther than the moderation of the church has hitherto carried it *. Since he was a prieſt of the true God, as well as king of Salem, or Jeruſalem, are we to believe that his ſubjects were all idolaters? The ſuppoſition cannot be reconciled to common ſenſe; and ſince it cannot, ſure I am that the propoſitions I combat cannot be ſo, nay I have the authority of the bible on my ſide. I ſhall have it ſo again before I have done.

IF I would proceed now, as learned men preſume to do very frequently, and without the leaſt ſcruple, I might venture to affirm, on theſe foundations a little extended and improved, not only that the true God was known by the Egyptians, and by ſome of the people of Paleſtine before the vocation of ABRAHAM, but that this patriarch, who became the father of the faithful, tho ſaid to have been bred an idolater, learned this orthodox faith in Egypt, and the neighbouring countries, if he was ſo bred in his own. But I am not ſcholar enough to preſume to affirm on wild conjecture. I dare go no farther than ſufficient probability leads me, and ſufficient vouchers ſupport me. With theſe on my ſide, I might go on to ſhew,

* What is here ſaid, is ſaid on the authority of St. PAUL; for if we believe MOSES, it may be that MELCHISEDECH paid tithes to ABRAHAM.

that

that the unity of a Supreme God was taught both by the chaldaeans, and the magi, and might reſt on the proofs brought by CUDWORTH in his intellectual ſyſtem, by HIDE in his treatiſe concerning the religion of the antient Perſians, and by other authors, leaving critics, who are not able to ſubvert the ſyſtems of theſe writers, to nibble at ſome particular circumſtances. But I chooſe to leap at once to the extremity of the Eaſt, and to ſhew by anecdotes leſs common, that a nation, lately known, had, in as great, or even a greater antiquity, the ſame faith.

THE nation I mean is the Chineſe, who will not be ſuſpected, one would think, of having had any communication with the Iſraelites, tho I would not anſwer for ſuch antiquaries as HUETIUS, nor others of that ſtamp. The Chineſe have their pentateuch as well as the Jews, and one volume of it is as old as FOHI the founder of their empire. Two other volumes contain records as old at leaſt as the deluge, and the two laſt are collections from other antient monuments publiſhed by CONFUCIUS, who lived ſix hundred years before CHRIST, and was therefore elder than ESDRAS. The chineſe ſcholars, as proud of the antiquity of their nation as ever any of thoſe who diſputed formerly about theirs could be, might diſregard our moſt antient traditions, and look on MOSES as a modern hiſtorian. They might found their incredulity on their credulity, and their poſitiveneſs on their ignorance; which is the general caſe of bigots in the Weſt, as well as in the Eaſt. But for us, who have the happineſs to live in this inlightened age, and who pretend to examine every thing, and to judge according to evidence, we ſhould have no good grace to reject the claſſical books of the Chineſe. They come to us upon as good original authority as that of the Jews, they contain as few things that are repugnant to the general obſervation and experience of mankind

kind as any other antient records, and much fewer than ſome; and they have been preſerved in a manner that gives them a ſingular authenticity, into which I will not enter, becauſe it would lead me far, and might cauſe ſome invidious compariſons *.

THIS authenticity is ſo well eſtabliſhed, that the atheiſts in China are forced to ſubmit to it, and tho their advantage would be to reject theſe books, they endeavour, by all the artifice of ſophiſtry, to drag a meaning out of them, which may ſeem to ſet the opinion of antiquity on their ſide. The antient ſages among the Chineſe, like thoſe of other nations, delivered their doctrines in ſhort apophthegms, in parables and allegories. They who followed were not ſo laconic, but even they dealed much in figure; and allegory allegoriſing allegory very often by way of explanation, the ſenſe, which was at firſt obſcure, grew to be worſe than obſcure. It grew to be litigious. The paraphraſes and commentaries multiplied, the diſputes increaſed, and the labor on every ſide has been to confirm different and oppoſite opinions, by different expoſitions of the ſame text. The language, as well as genius, of this people has helped to increaſe the confuſion, not ſo much indeed as if theſe books had paſſed thro ſeveral languages, but ſtill a great deal from the ſcarcity of words, and the neceſſity of ſupplying this defect, when they ſpeak by numberleſs inflections and tones of voice, and when they write by numberleſs points and accents.

A JESUIT, who reſtored the miſſion in the laſt century, after it had been ſome time interrupted by the authority of the government, took a method which it is to the preſent purpoſe to mention. He engaged in the diſpute that was carried on between the theiſts and the atheiſts, and maintained in concert

* Vid. Scien. Sin. &c.

with

with the former, that the antient Chineſe believed and worſhiped one God. This God, the God of their fathers, denied by ſome, forgot by more, and almoſt unknown, he declared to be the God whoſe revelation, and whoſe will he came to publiſh among them. Neither he, nor thoſe who followed him have made many real converts to chriſtianity, nor perſuaded that people to believe that his religion was in former times eſtabliſhed amongſt them, tho many pious frauds have been employed for that purpoſe. But in the other part, there has been leſs difficulty, and more ſucceſs, for the ſtate of the diſpute ſeems to have ſtood thus.

A BEING called XAM TI, which words ſignify the Supreme King, appears in all their antient books to have been worſhiped as the diſpenſer of temporal good and evil to mankind. FOHI offered victims, and HOAM TI built a temple to this divinity. From this time, that is from an aera anterior to any of ours, the ſame worſhip continued, together with religious rites practiſed in honor of inferior ſpirits *, who are ſometimes called the miniſters of the Supreme King, and who are ſaid by one of the interpreters of CONFUCIUS, to exerciſe their offices " in hoc " coeli et terrae medio," to bring bleſſings on the good, and puniſhments on the wicked. The book XU KIM ſays expreſſly, that their great emperor and legiſlator XUN ſacrificed to XAM TI, and to the ſix principal ſpirits. Another claſſical book mentions a very antient edict, by which all the people are commanded to pay honor to the Supreme Emperor of heaven, and likewiſe to the ſpirits, that the ſpirits may intercede for the happineſs of the people, " ut pro populo flagitarent felicita-" tem." Such paſſages, and a multitude of others to the like effect, are found in the antient books of the Chineſe, as we learn from the jeſuits, from whom alone we can have any tole-

* Vi. CONFUC.

rable

rable information, and it ſhould ſeem that ſuch authorities were ſufficient to decide the controverſy, and to leave no doubt whether the antient people of this country believed a God, or were atheiſts. But the men of letters among them at this time profeſs a ſort of ſpinoziſm, to which they endeavour to reconcile theſe paſſages, and there are many examples in the "ſcientia "ſinica" of the extravagant paraphraſes they make for this purpoſe.

The atheiſts inſiſt, and the theiſts admit, that the word Tien, which ſignifies heaven, is frequently uſed now, and was ſo antiently as ſynonymous to the words Xam Ti. What the atheiſts would infer from thence is obvious, but by no means concluſive. Their forefathers imagined, as I believe that all the antient people of the world did, and as almoſt all the people of the world do ſtill, that the habitation of God, and all celeſtial beings was above that canopy which appeared to be ſpread over their heads, and which they called heaven. From hence the cuſtom aroſe of employing the word which ſignifies the place of reſidence, for the word that denotes the being who is ſuppoſed to reſide in it. But the argument, that reſults from the promiſcuous uſe of theſe words, will turn, according to my apprehenſion, directly againſt the uſe which the atheiſt would make of it. If the antient Chineſe had acknowledged no higher principle than matter and form, no ſupreme intelligent Being, the words Xam Ti, far from being uſed as ſynonymous to the word Tien, would never have come into uſe at all. A man who ſhould ſay at Pekin, China declared war againſt the Tartars, or the emperor of China did ſo, would ſpeak as intelligibly as a man at London would do, who ſhould ſay Great Britain, or the king of Great Britain, declared war againſt France. But the ſame manner of ſpeaking cannot obtain in a country that has neither emperor, nor king;

and no dutchman ever ſaid indifferently this Holland did, or this the king of Holland did. This argument muſt be the ſtronger in the mouths of chineſe theiſts; becauſe in the ſame books, wherein the words we have mentioned are thus uſed, the ſeparate exiſtence of the ſpirits of mountains, rivers, and cities, and of the ſeaſons, the ſun, the moon, and the planets is taught: and yet theſe ſeparate ſpirits, and the things over which they preſide, are ſpoken of with the ſame licence. They are called indifferently the ſpirit of the mountain, or of the river, and the mountain or the river; nay the very ſame words that are employed to ſignify the fortifications of a city, are employed to ſignify the tutelary ſpirits of that city. On the whole we may conclude, that a Supreme Being was known to the antient Chineſe, tho ſuperſtition, idolatry, and atheiſm have been ſo prevalent among that people ſince. The ſacrifices performed with ſo much order and pomp, ſo much reverence and religious awe, the faſts, the purifications, and the other acts of divine worſhip which were practiſed, were not performed and practiſed ſurely in honor of matter and form, nor directed to theſe vague ideas of the human mind. The empreſſes who nouriſhed ſilk worms, and weaved ornaments for the altars; the emperors who plowed and ſowed annually, and raiſed by the ſweat of their brows the fruits of the earth, which they offered on thoſe altars, acknowledged without doubt ſome other divinity than Tai Kie, and Li. Thus we muſt think, unleſs we can be as abſurd as Eusebius, and figure to our ſelves a ſort of religious atheiſts, who acknowledging no deity beſides dead and ſenſeleſs matter, yet worſhiped it, invoked it, and implored it's aſſiſtance. But this ſottiſhneſs and contradictious nonſenſe Cudworth cannot believe incident to human nature *, and I preſume to think that moſt men will be of the ſame mind.

* Intell. ſyſtem.

SEC-

SECTION II.

THE particular proofs that have been brought, or to which I have referred in this, and the foregoing eſſay, are ſufficient to deſtroy the credit of the aſſertions to which they are oppoſed. But it may be proper to ſhew farther, that if there were no ſuch particular proofs of the acknowledgment of the one true God by other nations beſides the Iſraelites, yet the aſſumption that he was acknowledged by them alone, and that all other nations were polytheiſts and idolaters, from the beginning, would deſerve to be rejected for it's abſurdity; ſince it will be found inconſiſtent with the tenor of the moſaical hiſtory, when we take ſcripture for our guide, and with all the rules of judgment that obſervation, experience, and good ſenſe ſuggeſt to us, when we conſider the human character, and the courſe of human affairs. I am not ſurpriſed when I meet in BOCHART with ſuch an aſſertion as this boldly advanced, that "there was no church before the deluge except "in the family of SETH," and that after the deluge, "till the "coming of CHRIST, God made himſelf known to no people "except to thoſe who were of the race of SEM *." But when I meet with ſuch aſſertions as I have quoted from Mr. LOCKE, in an author who lays aſide the comments and ſyſtems of divines, and betakes himſelf to the ſole reading of the ſcriptures, I confeſs myſelf ſurpriſed, to the laſt degree, at the weakneſs of the ſtrongeſt minds.

WE have nothing to do here with the antediluvian world. We leave the eccleſiaſtical hiſtory of it to BOCHART, and the natural to BURNET. But if we conſult the bible for what paſſed after the deluge, and is to our preſent purpoſe, we ſhall find

* Geog. Sac. l. 1. c. 1.

that the knowledge of the one true God, derived to NOAH from ADAM by uninterrupted ſucceſſion, and confirmed to him by many particular revelations, muſt have been common to him, and to his family, as much as thoſe particular precepts which he is ſaid to have received from the mouth of God, and which are called "praecepta noachidarum." The ſons of NOAH, therefore, when they diſperſed themſelves to re-people the world, muſt have carried this knowledge with them, and have communicated it to their deſcendants, in all the ſettlements they made, and in all the colonies that were propagated from theſe.

THIS is ſo evident that it would ſuffer no diſpute in any ſimilar caſe: and yet for reaſons not hard to find, nor proper to avow, it is denied in this. LACTANTIUS ſays *, that HAM the ſon of NOAH ſettled in Arabia, and that having not received the worſhip of God by tradition from his father, the nation he founded was the firſt that knew not God. A ſtrange aſſertion indeed, and ſuch an one as cannot be true, if the ſacred hiſtory be ſo. We read there †, that the patriarch lying drunk and naked in his tent, and this ungracious ſon ſeeing him in that indecent condition, he told it to his brothers; that SEM and JAPHET went reverently backwards, ſaw not their father's nudity, and threw a cloak over him §. After this, NOAH pronounced the prophetical curſe againſt CHANAAN, the ſon of HAM, who was to be the ſervant of the ſervants of his brothers ‖; and this prophecy, it is ſaid by BOCHART and others, had it's completion when the Chanaanites were ſubdued by the Iſraelites. But whatever criticiſms good or bad may be made on it, and whatever reflection the puniſhment of CHANAAN,

* De Orig. Er. c. 4.
† Gen. ix.
§ —— Patris virilia non viderunt.
‖ —— Servus ſervorum erit fratribus ſuis.

who

who had no ſhare in his father's crime, may ſuggeſt, this gave the Iſraelites the ſole title they had to the land of promiſe by the grant God made of it to the poſterity of ABRAHAM, and was employed to juſtify all the cruelties they exerciſed on the Chanaanites.

THIS unfortunate perſon was not only puniſhed in his race, as the prophecy threatened, but his name and memory are cruelly perſecuted to this day by the unrelenting wrath of jewiſh and chriſtian writers. Some have accuſed him of gelding his father, and ſome of committing inceſt with his mother. He was baniſhed, they ſay, to the ſcorching climate of Africa, and the color of his poſterity is a laſting monument of the blackneſs of his crimes. He not only preſerved and propagated the necromancy which he had learned of the laſcivious angels before the deluge *, but he became himſelf an object of idolatry, as he had been an idolater, and was worſhiped under the name of JUPITER HAMMON. They who can believe all this, may believe that polytheiſm and idolatry were eſtabliſhed immediately after the deluge. But they, who are not quite ſo credulous, will ſee that ſuch opinions are irreconcileable to the ſcriptures, and to common ſenſe. NOAH might be as angry as he pleaſed with his reprobate ſon, and might conceal from him as many traditions as he could, yet ſtill this ſon had been an eyewitneſs of the deluge, he had been ſaved with the reſt of the family in the ark, he had aſſiſted his father without doubt in building it, and in making all the other preparations for that great cataſtrophe, as well as for the renewal of the ſpecies of animals, and the reſtoration of things afterwards. Is it poſſible to conceive, that he ſhould not have heard, whilſt they floated together over the drowned world, who that God was by whoſe power it was drowned, and what thoſe crimes were which had

* BOCHART. Geog. Sac. l. 4. c. 1.

drawn

drawn this aſtoniſhing deſtruction on mankind? It is impoſſible. His father could not conceal this knowledge from him. HAM knew the one true God moſt certainly, and had often joined in the worſhip of him. He could no more be ignorant of God than he could be of the deluge.

THIS is ſo very plain, that it cannot be directly, nor generally denied, whatever expreſſions may be ſometimes uſed by men whom learning emboldens, and zeal is apt to tranſport. But then the chronology, founded on the genealogies in the book of Geneſis, ſuppoſes the tradition of theſe revelations, by which God communicated himſelf to man, to have been preſerved ſo little a time after the deluge, that it gives a color to ſuppoſe all the nations of the world, nay even the deſcendants of SEM, ignorant of the one true God: and on this aſſumption, preſumptuous dogmatical perſons, who affect to be in the whole ſecret of the divine oeconomy, eſtabliſh the reaſon that they aſſign by another aſſumption, for the election and ſeparation of the poſterity of ABRAHAM from all other people. Infinite wiſdom, it ſeems, could contrive no other expedient for continuing the primitive faith and worſhip, for ſuch that of the one true God was by theſe accounts, among the deſcendants of one family that had repeopled the earth, except this of reviving them, and continuing them by ſuch a ſeries of revelations and miracles among one people, as would have made any revival of them unneceſſary among any other; becauſe they would have been more than ſufficient to continue them uncorrupted over the whole world, not only till the vocation of ABRAHAM four hundred years after the deluge, not only till the coming of the Meſſiah two thouſand years after that, but even to this hour, and to the conſummation of all things.

SOME

SOME place the aera of idolatry preciſely at SERUG, who was three generations older than ABRAHAM. Sir JOHN MARSHAM thinks it a very proper date *. A probable one I am ſure it is not, nor indeed a proper one for any purpoſe, except that of making mankind idolaters juſt in time for introducing the vocation of ABRAHAM. This might render it proper for EUSEBIUS, EPIPHANIUS, and all the tribe of Jews, and Chriſtians who have employed every literary artifice to confine the knowledge and worſhip of God to the choſen ſeed, and to repreſent them as the ſole object of providential care for twenty centuries. But I think that the learned and judicious chronicler has not deſerved to be ranked among this partial and colluſive tribe. We might call them the blind tribe too, ſince they muſt not have ſeen, unleſs you ſuppoſe that they ſaw, but depended on the blindneſs of a then ignorant world, that this knowledge and worſhip could not have been as confined as they ſuppoſe it from the time of the flood, unleſs God had by one continued miracle concealed himſelf to eſtabliſh the kingdom of the devil, and altered the very nature of things to make ſo important, ſo univerſal, ſo indiſputable a tradition die before it's time, and, as we may ſay, at once.

WHEN the ſame perſons attempt to eſtabliſh the credibility of the moſaical hiſtory, they do not inſiſt alone upon the divine inſpiration of the author, but upon the ordinary means that he had of knowing, with the greateſt certainty, all that we find related in the pentateuch. Theſe means were the traditions which they ſuppoſe to have come freſh and authentic to him thro a very ſmall number of generations, tho from a very great antiquity. ADAM lived nine hundred and thirty years; and the deluge happened ſixteen centuries and an half after the crea-

* Can. Chron. Sac. 4.

tion.

tion. NOAH therefore, who was born ſix hundred years before the deluge, had lived with thoſe who had lived with the firſt of men. NOAH continued alive three hundred and fifty years after the deluge, that is within ſeventy ſix years of the vocation of ABRAHAM, and SEM the ſon of NOAH died juſt as many years after this vocation. From ABRAHAM the traditions paſſed to ISAAC, and from him to JACOB, and all the perſons who had converſed with this patriarch could not be dead in the courſe of a century which intervenes between the deceaſe of JACOB, and the birth of MOSES. Thus you ſee that the traditions from ADAM, to this legiſlator and hiſtorian, paſſed thro about ſeven generations, and from NOAH to ABRAHAM, and his cotemporaries, thro one or two at moſt, according to this chronology.

LET us take now this chronology for good, whatever objections may be made to it, or how precarious ſoever the principles of it deſerve to be eſteemed. But then let us aſk every man of ſenſe and candor who receives it, whether he can perſuade himſelf that in the days of ABRAHAM, about four hundred years after the deluge, nay much ſooner, in the days of SERUG, the exiſtence of that God who had deſtroyed and reſtored the world, in ſo aſtoniſhing a manner juſt before, could be wholly loſt in the memory of mankind? I ſay juſt before, with very good reaſon; becauſe the diſtance of three or four centuries, when the lives of men were reckoned by centuries, may be called properly juſt before. The deluge was an event as modern to ABRAHAM, and the men of that age, as the reſtoration of King CHARLES the ſecond is to us of this age. Could the belief and worſhip of God be loſt by the deſcendants of SEM, an hundred years before the death of SEM? Could they be loſt even during the life of NOAH? Is it poſſible to figure to ourſelves the children of theſe holy patriarchs profeſſing polytheiſm, and

and practiſing idolatry, under the eyes of their fathers, and ABRAHAM, for inſtance, educated in the religion of the zabians, a new name given by our learned men to the chaldaeans, after mahometan writers, whilſt SEM was ſtill alive? Once more: Is it credible in the loweſt degree of credibility, that the chaldaeans, who were able to give CALISTHENES, two thouſand years after the flood, aſtronomical obſervations of as great a number of years at leaſt, ſhould know nothing of the flood, of the occaſion, of the author of it, in a word of the true God, in leſs than four centuries after it had happened? Theſe improbabilities are ſo very monſtrous, that it is marvelous any men ſhould be hardy enough to impoſe them, or ſilly enough to believe them. When MAIMONIDES is gravely quoted to prove TARAH an idolater, I let my book fall with aſtoniſhment. As ſoon would I quote NAVARETTE, a ſpaniſh miſſionary, to prove that the firſt coin of which we have any knowledge, is that made by TARAH the father of ABRAHAM, at the requeſt of king NINUS, and for thirty pieces of which JUDAS ſold his maſter.

I KNOW that JOSHUA is introduced in the twenty fourth chapter of the book aſcribed to him, ſpeaking in the name of God to the children of Iſrael, and telling them that TARAH, the father of ABRAHAM and NACHOR, had ſerved ſtrange gods. Now that here and there a man might begin to corrupt the worſhip of the true God, even in theſe early days, is juſt credible. But that the true God ſhould be unknown, and idolatry eſtabliſhed, at that time, is what I affirm to be incredible. Let commentators puzzle over the text, or take the fact as they find it without any examination, it will become other men to believe, that ſomething has happened to the jewiſh records, like that which happened to thoſe of another antient people, the Phoenicians; and that if the ſcribes of the former

have not corrupted their hiſtory, as PHILO BYBLIUS, who publiſhed a greek tranſlation of SANCHONIATHON in the reign of ADRIAN, complains that the prieſts of the latter had corrupted theirs; we may ſuppoſe, at leaſt, as ſome even of the jewiſh doctors have done, that the genealogies of the bible, far from being complete, are imperfect abſtracts; or that they have been compiled, as father FOUQUET, at his return from China, where he had reſided three and twenty years, aſſured me that the chronological table in the "ſcientia ſinica" had been. This table is compoſed of cycles of threeſcore years each, and all theſe cycles appear to us unbroken. But the learned jeſuit averred, that in the originals many of them wanted the beginning, and many of them the end. So that the ſpace of time to which this table refers could not be ſhorter, but might be immeaſurably longer than the chronological table, his brethren had put together, repreſents it. In a word, it will become reaſonable men to aſſume any hypotheſis, rather than to believe, againſt univerſal experience, the leaſt diſputable analogy, and the plaineſt dictates of common ſenſe, that the knowledge and worſhip of God were entirely forgot, whilſt the preachers of both, and the eye-witneſſes of the deluge, were ſtill alive.

LET us believe, on the authority of MOSES, that God truſting neither to the impreſſions of himſelf that are viſible on the whole face of nature, nor to the reaſon he gave to man, communicated this knowledge, and directed this worſhip by immediate revelations. But let us not be ſo abſurd as to believe, on any authority, that ſo many ſignal revelations, and aſtoniſhing miracles, atteſted by evidence unqueſtionable, and delivered down by immediate, not remote tradition, could be forgot ſo ſoon, nor that they could be remembered, and the great truths they communicated, and confirmed, be forgot. All theſe muſt have continued ſtrongly impreſſed on the minds of men

men much longer, even in the ordinary courſe of things. They muſt have continued to be ſo, not only in the countries where the repeopling of the world began, but wherever the founders of nations led their colonies from thence, which they began to do in the days of PHALEG, that is about a century after the flood. If we believe, on the authority of MOSES, that God made himſelf known by revelations and miracles to all the men that were at a certain time in the world, and from whom all the nations of the world deſcended, we cannot believe, on the ſame authority, becauſe we cannot believe conſiſtently with it, that his being and his worſhip were unknown to any of theſe, or forgot by any of them in the courſe of a very few years. The ſame authority would be made thus to contradict itſelf. In the caſe of another hiſtory, we ſhould ſay that neither might be true. But in the caſe of this we may ſay that both cannot. The firſt is a plain, independent fact, that muſt be reputed true on the whole, whatever diſputes may ariſe about circumſtances, or the hiſtory muſt be reputed fabulous. But the other depends on a chronology very liable to miſtakes, and not affecting the truth of the former. That famous aſtronomer, CASSINI, took the pains to calculate backwards a remarkable eclipſe, or two, that are mentioned in the antient chineſe annals. He found that ſuch eclipſes had been, but the dates were not exact. Juſt ſo we find that the one true God was eclipſed, if I may uſe this expreſſion; but tho the eclipſe laſted long, and laſts to this hour in ſome parts of the world, it could not begin ſo early, nor ſpread ſo univerſally as ſome men would induce us to believe. Will it be ſaid that the confuſion of languages, which began at once in the plains of Sennaar, and was followed by the diſperſion of mankind into all the parts of the earth, as the ſtory is generally, tho erroneouſly underſtood, interrupted or corrupted tradition, and gave occaſion to the immediate eſtabliſhment of polytheiſm and ido-

latry? But the argument to be drawn from this famous event will prove the very contrary. Tho languages were confounded, memory was not deſtroyed, and the knowledge which had been common to all men whilſt they lived together, and formed but one community, was continued, and delivered down in different languages after this diviſion. The knowledge was diſperſed, as thoſe who had it were diſperſed; and the ſame truths were taught then as they are now, in different tongues. Nay farther, this very confuſion and the diſperſion of mankind, which were brought about in ſo miraculous a manner, and by an immediate act of the ſame omnipotent Being who had ſo lately deſtroyed, and now reſtored the world, would have become, if this had been the caſe, the ſtrongeſt confirmations imaginable of the truths that were known before; and with the renewal, and confirmation of theſe truths in their minds, the ſons of men would have ſettled themſelves in ſeveral countries, and have given beginnings to the ſeveral nations. Among theſe, therefore, and in oppoſition to truths ſo well known, and ſo ſignally confirmed, it was not poſſible that the zabians, and the magians, and every other ſect of idolaters ſhould ariſe, till by a long tract of time, and a multitude of revolutions in the affairs of mankind, true primitive traditions, and genuine theiſm began to decay together. Then, and not till then, might prieſtcraft prevail, which Mr. Locke eſteems an obſtacle to the progreſs of true religion, and which I believe, on principles founded in the moſaical hiſtory, to have been the great corrupter of it after it had been eſtabliſhed. I might eaſily illuſtrate, and confirm theſe opinions, which are both true relatively to different times, and different places, by examples drawn from hiſtory, and even from the experience of our own age, from what paſſes in countries where the propagation of chriſtianity is attempted by miſſions, and in thoſe where this religion is already eſtabliſhed.

Some-

SOMETHING ſtronger than this may be objected to me. It may be ſaid, that whilſt I argue on probable reaſons, and endeavour to ſhew that the true God, and the true worſhip of him, could not be forgot, nor polytheiſm and idolatry be eſtabliſhed as ſoon as they are ſaid to have been, among the nations of the world, I do not enough conſider what paſſed among God's choſen people, in inſtances where no ſuppoſition of anachroniſm will help me to evade the force of ſcripture authority. Some pert divine may bid me deſcend a little lower in the hiſtory of the bible, and learn there how ſhort the duration was, even among this people, of thoſe impreſſions which revelations and miracles ſhould have rendered permanent, and almoſt indelible, according to me, even among the other people of the world who were left to walk in their own ways. I do ſo again, as I have done already often, and I find that the poſterity of ABRAHAM, or the children of ISRAEL, as they were called, after that ſome myſterious perſon or other had changed the name of JACOB who worſted him at wreſtling, into that of ISRAEL; I ſay, I find that they were become idolaters before their deliverance out of Egypt, confirmed, hardened idolaters, and ſo accuſtomed to the manners, and wedded to the ſuperſtitions of the Egyptians, that however MOSES drew them forth as a ſeparate people, there ſeemed to be, as EUSEBIUS * himſelf confeſſes it happened he knew not how, no perceivable difference between them and the Egyptians. This may well appear the more ſurpriſing, if it be true, according to the common reckoning, that JACOB died leſs than two centuries before the exode, that JOSEPH died about fifty years after his father, and that LEVI had not been dead ſo long when AARON was born, and MOSES after him. How this could happen, neither EUSEBIUS was able to account, nor is any man elſe. Dr. SPENCER †

* Praep. Evan. l. 7. c. 8. † De Leg. Heb. rit. l. 1. c. 1.

takes

takes pains to prove the fact, and it is something odd to see the authority of EUSEBIUS and THEODORET, of MAIMONIDES, and R. JUDA superfluously employed to confirm what the bible had proved in several places to his hand. But when he goes about to reconcile the fact to some notion of reasonable probability, he succeeds still worse, and does as much too little, as he had done more than enough. The learned writer thinks, that if this people had been treated in a better manner by the Egyptians, they could however have hardly avoided taking up the barbarous manners of that nation to which they had been so long accustomed. But he argues, "à fortiori," that this was inevitable, because they endured a cruel servitude in Egypt, and because such a servitude renders men little attentive to religious matters, and disposes them to conform to the manners and genius of their masters *. Now the very reverse of this maxim, and this reasoning, seems to me to be true. The fear of stripes may produce, whilst it continues, such a conformity in outward shew, but it can dispose men inwardly to embrace the manners and opinions, religious, or others, of their tyrants, no more than it can dispose them to love their persons, and even the appearance of such a conformity will cease whenever the slavish estate ceases. It will not only cease, but the slaves become freemen will throw off every badge of their slavery, and prefer the manners and opinions of those especially by whom they are delivered, to such as they professed thro fear, when they were under the lash of their taskmasters, "pugnis "fustibusque saevientes. †" Tyranny may make hypocrites, it can never make proselytes. Whoever has studied the human nature, and been careful to observe the course of human affairs, must think it repugnant to both, not only that the Israe-

* Tam servilis autem, et infaelix vivendi conditio, hominum animos angustos reddere solet, rerum coelestium curâ vacuos, et in dominorum suorum mores et ingenia pronos. Ibid.

† Ibid.

lites

lites ſhould forget the traditions of their fathers, and the God of ABRAHAM, of ISAAC, and of JACOB, in ſo ſhort a time, but that they ſhould have been as much wedded to idolatry, as the Egyptians themſelves were.

BUT if this be ſtrange, it is ſtranger ſtill to obſerve how little effect revelations of public notoriety, occaſional, and conſtant or ſtanding miracles before the exode, at the exode, in the wilderneſs, in the promiſed land, under their judges, and under their kings, had on the ſame people. They forgot the true God, even whilſt he conducted them viſibly thro the deſert. They revolted from him whilſt the peals of thunder, that proclaimed his deſcent on the mountain, rattled in their ears, and whilſt he dictated his laws to them. All the power that omnipotence could exert was not ſufficient to revive in the minds of this ſtubborn generation, the faith and piety of their fathers, nor a due and laſting ſenſe of that religion which they had certainly followed, for ſome time at leaſt, after their ſettlement in Egypt: and Dr. SPENCER therefore might have termed their manners barbarous with much more reaſon than he applied that epithet to thoſe of the Egyptians *. As the means of conviction, and the motives of ſubmiſſion to the religion that MOSES inſtituted, continued, and increaſed, ſo did the indocility, and apparent incredulity of this elect people. Neither the promiſes, nor the threatenings, the rewards, nor the puniſhments, by which God endeavoured to attach them to himſelf, neither his condeſcenſion in wearing their crown, and in governing them like an earthly monarch till they depoſed him, nor his conſtant reſidence even after his depoſition among them, could ſucceed. They were proof againſt miracles to ſuch a

* Iſraelitas, ſub prima incolatûs aegyptiaci tempora, ſcientiae divinae lampada à patribus acceptam habuiſſe, et religionem avitam integram et illibatam diu tenuiſſe, nobis facilè perſuadeamus. Ibid.

degree,

degree, that there would not have been more room for ſurpriſe, if we had been told, that NOAH and his family ſerved ſtrange gods even in the ark, than there is to find, in the hiſtory of this people, that they revolted back to idolatry nine hundred years together on every occaſion. This hiſtory, in ſhort, contains many particular miracles which operated effectually againſt the ordinary courſe of nature, phyſical and moral, and at the ſame time the whole thread of it is a ſyſtem of miracles ineffectually operated, for a purpoſe ſo natural, that every one of them ſeems to make the next unneceſſary.

IF the divine now ſhould aſk me, after all that I have owned in favor of his argument, whether that which happened at, and after the exode, might not happen after the deluge? whether the families that repeopled the earth at this period, might not forget the true God, and his worſhip immediately after it, notwithſtanding any traditions, as we ſee that God's choſen and favorite people did during their bondage in Egypt, and as they continued to do very frequently from that time till the babylonian captivity, notwithſtanding the miraculous advertiſements, and the interpoſitions of providence ever watchful to prevent theſe apoſtacies? If the divine, I ſay, ſhould aſk me ſuch queſtions, my anſwer would be this. The hiſtory of the bible tells me, that theſe things paſſed as I have repreſented them. But I know that they are repugnant to univerſal experience, and I have a conſcious certainty that they are ſo to the human nature. Look into the hiſtory of the world, reverend ſir, and you will find too many examples of pretended revelations, of forged miracles, and of groundleſs traditions, that have prevailed among mankind from age to age, to leave it in your power to think that unexceptionable revelations, real miracles, and certain traditions, could be ever ineffectual. Nothing leſs than the greateſt of all miracles could make them ſo, and who ſhould work

ſuch

ſuch a miracle? Not God moſt certainly; for thoſe which were diſappointed of their effect, you ſay, were wrought by him. Was it then the devil? But how came he to have ſuch a power, and to be ſuffered to exert it in ſuch a caſe? I know farther, moſt intuitively, that no creature of the ſame nature as I am of, and I preſume the Iſraelites were human creatures, could reſiſt the evidence of ſuch revelations, ſuch miracles, and ſuch traditions as are recorded in the bible. Look into yourſelf, reverend ſir, and you will find it to be ſo. God appearing in all the terrors of his majeſty, and his prophets denouncing judgments which were inſtantly, and literally fulfilled, to mention theſe particulars alone out of many, muſt have rouzed the moſt ſtupid, have terrified the moſt audacious, and have convinced the moſt incredulous.

Such an anſwer as this might procure me in return ſome eccleſiaſtical billingſgate. I might be called infidel, deiſt, and perhaps atheiſt. I ſhould be accuſed certainly of diſbelieving the holy ſcriptures. My reply to ſo angry a diſputant would be calm, and ſuch as might teach charity to thoſe who preach it ſo much, and practiſe it ſo little. "Ne ſaevi magne ſacer-" dos." I do not ſo much deny the truth of the facts related, as I oppoſe the application, and the uſe made of them. You argue from the conduct of the Iſraelites to that of other nations, and would perſuade us, that all theſe might be polytheiſts and idolaters from the beginning; becauſe the true God, and his worſhip were forgot ſo ſoon, and ſo often by his choſen people. But I deny that any ſuch analogy will hold good. The Iſraelites were a people ſet apart from the reſt of mankind, and indeed ſo ſet apart, and ſo diſtinguiſhed, that the proceedings of God towards them, and their behaviour towards God, and towards man, make all together ſuch a ſeries of hiſtory as can be compared with no other; ſuch an hiſtory as

ſhews us this people, but leads us to judge by analogy of no other. In prophane hiſtory we acquire experience of mankind, and of human affairs. The benefit we reap from it conſiſts in this, and by this general knowledge we judge of every particular hiſtory that we read. In ſacred hiſtory we acquire none of this experience. It is the hiſtory of a people not only ſet apart from the great community of mankind, but in many reſpects taken out, as it were, of the human ſyſtem. To make the events recorded in it ſerve as foundations, therefore, of the judgments we paſs on thoſe that may have happened among other people, is juſt as abſurd as it would be to make a collection of miracles, that is, of events out of the ordinary courſe of nature, and even repugnant to it, ſerve as the foundation of natural and experimental philoſophy.

Let us believe then what is in the bible, becauſe it is there. Not like Tertullian, becauſe it is impoſſible, or abſurd; but altho it be improbable, or inconſiſtent. At the ſame time let us not apply the extraordinary events that we find there, to ſuch as happen in the ordinary courſe of human affairs. Much leſs let us apply our own obſervation and experience, by which we judge very properly of other hiſtories, to that of the bible. That of the bible muſt ſtand on the bottom of its own authority, independently of all other; and I am perſuaded that nothing has ſhaken this authority more than the ſilly attempts of ſome writers to confirm it by arguments drawn from the reaſon of things, that is, from a compariſon of ideas derived from human obſervation and experience. It ſeems to me, that divines ſhould reſt the authority both of the old and new teſtament on the proofs they are able to bring of their divine original, and of the uncorrupt manner in which they have been conveyed down to latter ages, ſolely.

To

To eſtabliſh the credit of other hiſtories, for I conſider the bible here only as an hiſtory, it is not indeed ſufficient to aſcertain the authors of them; becauſe theſe authors, being men, may have been deceived, or may have deſigned to deceive. For this reaſon their internal, as well as external proofs of authenticity are examined, and they are received, or rejected, as they appear conſiſtent or inconſiſtent, conformable or repugnant to the obſervation and experience of mankind. But this ſecond examination is unneceſſary, when the queſtion is about the word of God, known to be ſuch by evidence ſuperior to all contradiction, or it is impertinent and prophane. If we could ſuppoſe the authenticity and divine original of the ſcriptures deſtitute of ſufficient external proof, this deficiency would not be ſupplied by all the ſkill of thoſe who pretend to diſcover, by their ſuperior penetration, the internal proofs. If the authenticity and divine original of them be, on the contrary, ſufficiently eſtabliſhed by external proof, it is both impertinent and prophane to pretend to confirm divine teſtimony, by ſhewing that there is reaſon to believe it true. Reaſon has been too much employed where it has nothing to do, and too much neglected where it has moſt to do. Men have believed implicitely, when they ſhould have reaſoned, in laying the grounds of faith; and they have reaſoned dogmatically, when they ſhould have believed implicitely, theſe grounds being once laid.

A MAXIM has been eſtabliſhed in theology, which may be brought to juſtify this proceeding againſt me, and the authority of St. AUSTIN may be brought to juſtify the maxim. But the authority of common ſenſe, much better than that of St. AUSTIN, will juſtify me in ſaying that the maxim is falſe. The maxim is this, that miracles themſelves are not to be admitted as proofs of a divine original, unleſs the cauſe, for which they are wrought, appears to us to be good, and therefore not till the

doctrines they atteſt have been examined. By a parity of reaſon it may be ſaid, that altho the external evidence which proves the ſcriptures of divine original, be full in that reſpect, yet the internal evidence muſt be ſought for in them to make their authenticity complete in every reſpect. This maxim, and this way of reaſoning were taken up perhaps very properly at a time when reports of miracles were eaſily believed, when every ſuppoſed magician was thought to perform them, and when they, who would not allow the pretenſions of APOLLONIUS THYANEUS, for inſtance, who was oppoſed by the pagans to CHRIST, and who was worſhiped as a god with CHRIST, ABRAHAM, and ORPHEUS by the emperor SEVERUS, were obliged however to acknowledge his miracles. But the caſe is widely altered, and it is as improper to inſiſt on this maxim now, as it might be proper then. We know now that miracles, real miracles, can be operated by no power but that of God, nor for any purpoſe, by conſequence, but ſuch as infinite wiſdom and truth direct and ſanctify. We know therefore that no fact, nor doctrine, repugnant to the divine nature and attributes, can have been vouched by miracles, nor be taught in the word of God: and the difference is great between rejecting any ſuch facts, or doctrines, and the authority on which they are founded, as in the caſe of the alcoran, for inſtance, and refuſing to admit all the facts and doctrines contained in a book proved by undeniable teſtimony of the fact to be the word of God; till, beſides this external proof, divines have furniſhed the internal proofs they boaſt of, which are often the wildeſt hypotheſes of imagination, and ſuch as a doctor of Mecca would hardly frame in behalf of the alcoran. Vain triflers! They pretend to develope the whole ſecret of a divine oeconomy relative to man; and tho it be ſo eaſy to diſcern what is evidently inconſiſtent with the divine attributes, that every reaſonable man is able to diſcern it, yet theſe men are not ſtopped by ſuch evi-

dence.

dence. The preſumptuous habits of theology carry them to talk of the plan, which they ſuppoſe infinite wiſdom to have formed, as if they viewed it from an higher ſtage of intelligence, and knowledge. From theſe whimſical paradoxes, they derive the greateſt part of what they call the internal evidence of the ſcriptures. On the whole, it is, I hope, plain by this time, that far from diſbelieving the hiſtory of the bible, I aſſert the authority of it, and endeavour to place it out of the reach of cavil, whilſt the divine does the contrary; for by taking the ſame liberty as he takes, and which every other man has the ſame right to take, ſome will pretend to find internal evidences of an human, where he pretends to find thoſe of a divine original: and thus the authenticity of the ſcriptures, inſtead of being once for all fixed, will be rendered by theological oſtentation a matter of eternal diſpute. But ſtill I deny, that the example of the Iſraelites at, and after the exode, under their judges, and under their kings, furniſhes any argument againſt me. All the facts contained in the moſaical hiſtory are true; be it ſo, at leaſt for argument ſake: but conſiſtently with them I may believe, nay conſiſtently with them I cannot believe otherwiſe, in oppoſition to Mr. Locke, and to all thoſe who went before him in aſſerting what he aſſerts, that mankind could not be polytheiſts and idolaters from the beginning, no, nor near the beginning, and conſequently that the belief and worſhip of the one true God could not be the national religion of the Iſraelites alone.

Let us conſider now what will reſult from another hypotheſis. We ſuppoſe then that men acquired without any revelations, general or particular, and by a due uſe of their reaſon, a knowledge of the one true God. That they might acquire it by theſe means, in former ages, cannot be denied with any ſort of modeſty, or candor; ſince we are able to demonſtrate invin-

invincibly this great truth by the ſame means: and if they might acquire it, on what pretence can it be ſaid that they did not? Modern philoſophy has opened a more glorious proſpect of the works of God than that which the antient nations appear to us to have had, and every new diſcovery adds to the magnificence of the ſcene, and to the force of the argument. But the great author of nature was always viſible in every part, even the moſt minute, of the ſyſtem of nature; and they who were far from ſeeing as much of it as we ſee, tho we too are far, very far ſurely, from ſeeing the whole, might eaſily obſerve an unity of deſign, which pointed out moſt evidently the unity of that Being by whoſe wiſdom the deſign was laid, and by whoſe power it was executed. All I aſſume therefore is, that among creatures to whom God has given ſenſe and intellect, there have been many at all times who not only ſaw like the reſt what was viſible, but who diſcovered by reflection and contemplation what was intelligible, and yielded to the teſtimony God has given of himſelf. On this aſſumption we ſhall find reaſon to believe that genuine theiſm could be at no time confined to any one people, and that it muſt have been at different times, and in different places diſcovered, eſtabliſhed, corrupted, loſt, and renewed, according to the viciſſitude of human affairs.

We repreſent the firſt communities of men roving about in herds, like ſome other animals, and ſuch as we ſee many of the ſavage people of the world at this hour. As long as they continued in that ſtate, the unity of God might be unknown to them, becauſe, reaſon operating much more ſlowly, and eſpecially in ſuch a ſtate, than the affections and paſſions of our nature, a multitude of ſuperſtitious notions, ariſing from ignorance and fear, could not fail to take poſſeſſion of the minds of theſe men, and to prevent, or miſguide their reaſon. All the

the objects that ſurrounded them were new to them, and as they had not the experience of others to direct their judgment concerning the impreſſions which theſe objects made upon them, ſo their own experience came too late. The prejudices of ſuperſtition had rendered them unattentive to it, or unfit to make a reaſonable uſe of it, before it came. But this could not continue, even on this hypotheſis, to be long the univerſal ſtate of mankind.

NATIONS were civiliſed, wiſe conſtitutions of government were framed, arts and ſciences were invented and improved, long before the remoteſt time to which any hiſtory, or tradition extends; and all this could not have been done without much more information of the moral and phyſical ſyſtem of the world, and much greater efforts of human reaſon than were neceſſary to demonſtrate the firſt principle of true theiſm. Let us conclude, therefore, on grounds of the higheſt probability, that God was known to ſuch as made a due uſe of their reaſon, and demonſtrated by them to others, even in nations unknown to us; and ſince he was known, that he was worſhiped; for to ſay he was known and not worſhiped, is little leſs abſurd than it would be to ſay he was worſhiped and not known.

BUT tho God was known and worſhiped, it will not follow that this knowledge and worſhip were preſerved, or even eſtabliſhed any where in all the purity of theiſm. Were they ſo among the Iſraelites, who retained ſo many of the rites, and ceremonies, and ſuperſtitious opinions of the lower Egypt? tho they believed the unity of God, and abhorred idols, like the people of the upper? In ſhort are they ſo at this time? Are they ſo among us? It has been obſerved in the foregoing eſſay, and I have juſt touched the ſame thing in this, that the ſeeds of ſuperſtitious opinions and practices having been ſowed before

fore nations were formed, or governments eſtabliſhed, it is not unreaſonable to believe that the firſt legiſlators cultivated them for political purpoſes. Nay even ſuch as were neither polytheiſts, nor idolaters themſelves, for it is very reaſonable to ſuppoſe there were ſome ſuch, might nurſe up an abundant crop of ſuperſtition by the very means by which they deſigned to promote true religion. This we ſhall not think improbable if we conſult hiſtory, or if we conſider it analogically to the experience of our own age. To work effects contrary to the intention of them, is a fate that attends very frequently the beſt of human expedients, and the reflection does no honor to our wiſdom and foreſight. Private ambition grew up naturally among thoſe who intended nothing more by promoting religion, than the political purpoſes of government, and the enthuſiaſm of ſuperſtition aroſe ſtill more naturally among thoſe who promoted it, becauſe they believed in it. Both theſe motives contributed to corrupt genuine theiſm, to diſguiſe firſt, and to conceal afterwards, the ſimplicity of natural religion under the tinſel, and the embroidery of polytheiſm and idolatry. From both of them proceeded ſo many falſe pretences of revelation and inſpiration, the legerdemain of miracles, and ſuch blaſphemous affectations of a divine nature, or miſſion, as the indian FOE, or the arabian MAHOMET impoſed on a great part of mankind.

THAT men are capable of falling from the knowledge of the one true God into polytheiſm, and from a pure worſhip of him into idolatry and ſuperſtition, by ſuch means as I have mentioned, and by others, whether this knowledge and this worſhip were communicated to them by revelation, or diſcovered by the uſe of reaſon as other truths are, this very reaſon as well as experience will evince. But the difference between the hypotheſis which aſſumes, that the unity of the Supreme Being

Being was taught by revelation alone, confirmed by miracles, and delivered down by tradition; and the hypotheſis we go upon here, which aſſumes that this truth might be diſcovered by reaſon as well as by revelation at all times, and therefore muſt have been diſcovered at ſome times by thoſe who had no other guide but reaſon, deſerves to be conſidered a little more.

THE propoſition which affirms that all the nations of the world, except the Iſraelites, were ignorant of the true God from the beginning, is, in many reſpects, to the laſt degree abſurd. It implies that the Iſraelites were a nation from the beginning. But were they ſo, if we reckon from ADAM, or even from NOAH, or even from the vocation of their father ABRAHAM? If they were not ſo, why are they excepted as ſuch from the beginning out of the aſſumed general ignorance of mankind concerning the true God? Some divines will tell us, that tho God might be diſcovered, yet he could not be fully and certainly diſcovered, nor ſuch as he is, by reaſon alone. That he was pleaſed, therefore, to diſcover himſelf by immediate revelation, not to the bulk of mankind, but to patriarchs, to prophets, and to his choſen people, both when they were a family and when they were a nation. That he has revealed himſelf ever ſince in the ſame manner, and to the ſame perſons, that is, to his elect, in the ſcriptures; which help them, ſays CALVIN in the ſixth chapter of the firſt book of his inſtitution, like ſpectacles to read diſtinctly and clearly what others diſcern confuſedly and imperfectly. But they who compare the ideas and notions concerning the Supreme Being that reaſon collects from the phaenomena of nature, phyſical and moral, which we know to be the works of God, with thoſe that the books of the old teſtament, which we ſuppoſe to be his word, give us, will be apt to lay theſe ſpectacles aſide, and to conclude that

the God of ABRAHAM, ISAAC, and JACOB cannot be that glorious ſupreme all-perfect Being whom reaſon ſhewed them, and whom they diſcerned with their naked eyes. But again: What do thoſe words, all the nations of the world, ſignify? If we underſtand them literally, they affirm what it is impoſſible the affirmers ſhould know to be true. If we underſtand by them, as we are apt to do, a few nations only, ſuch as were formed on the firſt repeopling of the world by NOAH, and his immediate deſcendants, they affirm what is ſtill more improbable. In a word, this propoſition ſtands in direct contradiction to the other, which is part of the ſame hypotheſis; for if the knowledge of the true God was communicated by revelation, and propagated by the firſt men who were witneſſes of this revelation, according to the moſaical account, the true God muſt have been univerſally known in the beginning, and from the beginning. This needs no proof, it is ſelf-evident; and they who will maintain that the nations of the world were ignorant of the true God from the beginning, with any conſiſtency, muſt give up MOSES; and inſtead of aſſuming ſuch a revelation, and a tradition in conſequence of it, they muſt admit that all men were ignorant of the true God, till ſome of them diſcovered this great truth by philoſophical obſervation and meditation, and communicated it to others, as it is ſaid that ABRAHAM did.

THEY may ſuppoſe, as much as they pleaſe, that the tradition was worn out, and the knowledge loſt entirely, in leſs time than would have been ſufficient to deſtroy the memory of the moſt trifling events, and the leaſt important opinions; even this will not ſave their hypotheſis. On the ſuppoſition of ſuch a revelation, and of ſuch a tradition, it would be ſtill abſurd to aſſert, that all the nations of the world were ignorant of the true God from the beginning; as it would be hard, on the ſuppoſition

poſition that this knowledge was ever entirely loſt among men, to account for the belief of one Supreme Being, which prevailed in the eſoterical, or ſecret doctrines of philoſophers, whilſt their exoterical, or public doctrines, were favorable to polytheiſm. All this, a general ignorance, and a particular knowledge, can be accounted for no other way than by admitting, not only that the knowledge of one Supreme Being is to be acquired by reaſon, without the neceſſity of any revelation, or of any miracles to impoſe it, and that it has been ſo acquired in the improved, tho not in the original ſtate of mankind; but alſo that it may be, and has been eſtabliſhed in general and national belief, at certain times, and under the influence of favorable conjunctures among ſeveral antient nations. The authority of revelation, if God revealed himſelf to men in any other manner than by his works, being conveyed down by tradition, and this tradition being ſpent in a long tract of time, and by the various accidents which happen according to the courſe of human affairs, nothing would remain to keep up, or to renew, this belief in the minds of men. But the authority of reaſon ceaſing to be exerted, or ceaſing to prevail, reaſon would ſtill remain, and be at hand to renew this belief, and propagate it again in a more happy ſeaſon. Revelation deſcends like a torrent, and bears down all before it, whilſt the tradition of it is freſh and ſtrong. But this force diminiſhes gradually; the ſtream grows feeble, and ceaſes at laſt to run, by a neceſſity ariſing from the nature of things. The ſtream whereof reaſon is the ſource, may be obſtructed in it's courſe. It may creep ſcarce perceived in the ſame channels, for it may diſappear entirely; but when it rolls no longer on the ſurface, it runs under ground, and is ever ready to break out anew.

Our phyſical and moral ſyſtems are carried round in one perpetual revolution, from generation to corruption, and from

corruption to generation; from ignorance to knowledge, and from knowledge to ignorance; from barbarity to civility, and from civility to barbarity. Arts and ſciences grow up, floriſh, decay, die, and return again under the ſame, or other forms, after periods which appear long to us, however ſhort they may be, compared with the immenſe duration of the ſyſtems of created being. Theſe periods are ſo diſproportionate to all human means of preſerving the memory of things, that when the ſame things return, we take frequently, for a new diſcovery, the revival of an art or ſcience long before known. It is much the ſame with opinions, and even with many demonſtrated principles of knowledge. The moſt abſurd of the former come into public vogue, as well as the moſt evident of the latter; and the latter go out of it again, as well as the former. Let us deſcend into ſome particulars that may ſerve to illuſtrate what is here ſaid.

When we look into the hiſtory of the Greeks and Romans, how ignorant do theſe people appear to have been in the art of navigation? In what cockboats was the fate of the war decided at Salamis? What idea muſt we have even of the carthaginian fleets, when we ſee them vanquiſhed by a people whoſe ſkill had gone, till the firſt punic war, little farther than hollowing trees into miſhapen and unwieldy canoes*? How ſlow was the progreſs of this art afterwards? Confined to the Mediterranean, and attempting little and ſeldom the Ocean, obliged in both to cling to the ſhore †, the ſtouteſt of their ſhips of war would have foundered where a Deal yawl rides ſecurely. Shall we conclude now from theſe repreſentations, that they ſhew us the beginning of navigation? No. We ſee in them the decay of the art. To inquire critically into the voyages of Bacchus, of Hercules, of Jason; to fix the times when theſe heroes floriſhed, or when Minos held the dominion of the ſea, would be imperti-

* Caudicariae naves. † Legere et radere littus.

nent

nent induſtry. It is enough to know, that tho the Greeks were frightened at the flux and reflux of the ſea, that new and aſtoniſhing phaenomenon to this knowing people, even at the time of ALEXANDER's expedition, the indian ocean, rough as it is, had been explored long before by merchants who ſailed from the coaſt of Arabia and Egypt. If HERCULES erected his columns at the mouth of the Streights, the Phoenicians paſſed beyond them. They viſited the coaſts of Portugal, the fortunate iſlands, or the Canaries, and even the utmoſt Thule; perhaps the other hemiſphere, and the iſlands, at leaſt, which COLUMBUS had the honor of diſcovering ſome thouſands of years afterwards. The ſhips of MIDACRITUS, or MELCARTUS, traverſed the bay of Biſcay, and brought lead or tin " ex caſſiteride inſulâ," probably from Cornwall. This we learn from obſcure tradition, and what do we ſee in the clearer light of hiſtory but the reſtoration of this very art? We have ſpoke of an art. Let us ſpeak now of a ſcience.

ASTRONOMY had made a low figure among the Greeks for ſome time before HIPPARCHUS, who lived about the time of the ſixth or ſeventh of the PTOLEMY's; and tho we hear much of the fame of THALES, of PYTHAGORAS, and EUDOXUS, yet aſtronomy and aſtrology, which we diſtinguiſh very properly, were in thoſe days confounded together. Men were much more attentive to diſcover the imaginary influences of the ſtars, than to obſerve their real motions: and the honors done to BEROSUS by the Athenians, for his divine predictions, ſhew us in what manner, and to what purpoſes this ſcience was cultivated a little before HIPPARCHUS, that is, in the time of ALEXANDER. HIPPARCHUS invented mathematical inſtruments for obſerving the celeſtial phaenomena, and obſerved, it is ſaid, very accurately. PTOLEMY, another aſtronomer, came after him, and tho he made ſome pretenſions to aſtrology, as others had done,

done, yet he was an aſtronomer in the proper ſenſe. He improved on the improvements of HIPPARCHUS, and the ſyſtem which bears his name was univerſally received. It continued to be ſo till COPERNICUS aroſe. But if we conclude from hence, that we ſee the whole riſe and progreſs of aſtronomy, or that COPERNICUS was the author of a new ſyſtem, we ſhall be much deceived. We ſee aſtronomy in its decayed and corrupt ſtate, and we ſee it recover from thence, and return back to its true principles. The beginnings of it, among the Egyptians and the Chaldaeans, if in truth it did begin among them, the progreſs they made, and the degree of perfection to which they carried it, are unknown to us. But beſides ſeveral probable reaſons, which determine us to think that they carried it very far, we know certainly that the true ſolar ſyſtem, which COPERNICUS diſcovered about two hundred years ago, was taught in the pythagorean ſchools above two thouſand years ago, and was by conſequence that of the ſchools of Egypt and Babylonia.

To ſpeak now of opinions, and of the ſelf-evident, or demonſtrated principles of real knowledge: the former fluctuate perpetually. When one of them alone can be true, a thouſand that ſtand in direct oppoſition to one another are entertained. Whilſt they laſt they are unſteady. Time and experience explode them often; and when they return into uſe again, they are ſeldom exactly the ſame. The latter are fixed and uniform. Time and experience confirm them, they cannot be exploded, they may be unknown, or they may be forgot; but whenever they are perceived by the mind, far from degenerating into opinions, they are perceived by every mind alike. Thus, I think, we are to underſtand that axiom of the ſtoician BALBUS, "opinio-"num commenta delet dies, naturae judicia confirmat." It may be, it has been ſaid, that the latter part of this axiom is often contradicted by experience, and that falſe demonſtrations have

have taken often the place of true, as opinions merely probable, nay improbable, have paſſed among whole nations for the moſt demonſtrated truths. But I ſuſpect that this has been the caſe in appearance rather than in reality, or that the exceptions are too few to invalidate the general rule. Truths that may be called properly the judgments of nature, becauſe they are conformable to the nature of things, and have been deduced from thence by a proceſs of reaſoning in every ſtep of which the mind has had intuitive knowledge, cannot be removed, they muſt be confirmed by time, the nature of things, and the reaſon of men continuing the ſame. But theſe very truths may be ſo diſguiſed by opinions which are thought to be compatible with them, which muffle them up, and which cling to them, tho they be parts of them no more than cloaths are parts of body, that the ſame principle of real knowledge profeſſed by different people, or at different times, appears to be a different principle. If DIAGORAS, or THEODORUS, or VANINI, or any other particular atheiſt, for a community of atheiſts never exiſted out of Mr. BAYLE's head, had been aſked, whether it is not the intereſt of every individual to ſubmit to government, and to promote the good of ſociety; or if any theiſt had been aſked, whether this be not the duty, as well as intereſt of every individual, they would all have anſwered in the affirmative, and have aſſented to theſe firſt principles of public and private morality. Notwithſtanding this, what a variety of opinions has there not been about this intereſt and this duty? They have been ſo various, as well as the practice of men conſequent from them, that whoever conſiders his own, or paſt ages, may be tempted to think, that in ſome countries the obligation of ſubmitting to government is eſteemed unconditional, and illimited; and in others, no obligation at all; or that, as he ſees no country wherein the common duties of ſociety are enough obſerved, ſo there are others wherein every man deems himſelf an individual, independent by nature,

nature, and diſavows any ſuch duty. Suppoſe now that in one of theſe countries liberty be eſtabliſhed on a ſyſtem of law, equally diſtant from tyranny, and from licentiouſneſs. Suppoſe that in another ſuch a reformation of manners be wrought, no matter by what means, that the duties of morality are practiſed in it univerſally, and with the utmoſt exactneſs, ſhall we conclude from theſe examples, that in the former caſe the principles of public, and in the latter thoſe of private morality, were never known, or had been loſt, and were then demonſtrated anew? Shall we not rather conclude, according to the truth of things, that theſe principles have been always known, and that the new eſtabliſhment, and the new reformation do nothing more than ſtrip them of the falſe opinions which were ſo complicated with them, that men derived their inſtitutions and notions, not from the ſure judgments of nature, but from the falſe comments of opinion *?

THUS again, the exiſtence of one ſupreme, ſelf-exiſtent, and all-perfect Being, the firſt intelligent cauſe of all things, was acknowledged, as we diſcern more or leſs clearly by almoſt all our antient traditions, in thoſe nations who had any pretence to be eſteemed civiliſed, and moſt directly and explicitely in thoſe that were the moſt inlightened by knowledge. But yet this bright and luminous truth, this judgment of nature, was clouded by ſuch a multitude of ſuperſtitious notions, that it appeared dubiouſly, and that ſomething which ſeemed repugnant to it might have been objected to every nation who profeſſed it in their outward, or even in their ſecret doctrine. An orthodox Iſraelite was ſcandaliſed, no doubt, when he beheld

* N. B. There is a paſſage in POLYBIUS worth being turned to on this occaſion. It is in the thirteenth book. He obſerves there how truth is diſguiſed, or concealed by the falſe opinions of men; but he inſiſts, that theſe laſt for a time only, and that truth prevails always.

among

among his heathen neighbours their deceaſed kings and heroes erected into divinities, and adored as ſuch. But we may aſſure ourſelves, that an inhabitant of Thebes in Egypt, who acknowledged no god but the unborn eternal KNEPH, or even a polytheiſt, who worſhiping many gods, that is, inferior divinities, acknowledged ſtill one Supreme Being, the monarch of gods and men, was not leſs ſcandaliſed when he ſaw this Being, of whom he had the ſublimeſt conceptions that the mind of man can frame, degraded into the rank of a local tutelary divinity, the God of ABRAHAM, of ISAAC, and of JACOB, the God of one family, and one nation, of a family who had ſtrolled into Egypt for bread, of a nation who had been long ſlaves in that country. In vain would the learned prieſts of all ſides have explained their ſymbolical rites, and myſtic doctrines. The Iſraelite would have remained convinced, that the one true God was unknown to the heathen; and the heathen, that he was unknown to the Iſraelite. It fared with this principle of knowledge, as PLUTARCH obſerves in one of his miſcellaneous tracts, in the manner that it fares with the virtues. The prudence of ULYSSES appeared different from that of NESTOR, and the juſtice of CATO from that of AGESILAUS. The ſame principle of knowledge, derived from the ſame uſe of reaſon, took various appearances from the various opinions that were complicated with it in the minds of men, much as the ſame virtue took a different hue, according to the different tempers, characters, and circumſtances of thoſe who profeſſed and practiſed it.

THIS ſeems to have been the ſtate of things till the coming of CHRIST. Whether the knowledge and the worſhip of the one true God were taught by revelation, or by reaſon, that which is affirmed concerning them cannot be true. In the firſt, caſe they muſt have been known from the beginning by all the people of the earth, and long before the Iſraelites grew up to be a nation.

In the ſecond caſe, the man who ſhould aſſert, that ABRAHAM, or any other of the patriarchs, was alone able to make theſe diſcoveries by dint of reaſon, and philoſophical reflection, would not deſerve a ſerious anſwer. Nay further, if we go upon the firſt ſuppoſition, that of revelation, if we take the words of ſome divines, that this belief and worſhip could be communicated no other way to mankind, and that this ſacred depoſite was truſted to a people choſen to preſerve it till the coming of the Meſſiah, this aſſumption will appear as little conformable to the reaſon of things, as ſeveral others are which the ſame men advance to be parts of the divine oeconomy, and for which they appeal to the reaſon of mankind. Reaſon will pronounce, that no people was leſs fit than the Iſraelites to be choſen for this great truſt on every account. They broke the truſt continually, and the miracles that were wrought to preſerve it, notwithſtanding their apoſtacies, would have preſerved it at leaſt as well all over the world. Beſides the revelations made to them were "ſhut up in a little corner of the "world, amongſt a people, by that very law which they received "with it, excluded from a commerce and communication with "the reſt of mankind," as Mr. LOCKE * obſerves very truly. A people ſo little known, and contemned, and thought vilely of by thoſe nations that did know them, were therefore very "unfit, "and unable to propagate the doctrine of one God in the world."

BUT wherefore, then, was this depoſite made to them? It was of no uſe to other nations before the coming of CHRIST, nor ſerved to prepare them for the reception of his goſpel; and after his coming, it was in this great reſpect of little uſe, if of any, to the Jews themſelves. They believed univerſally one God, but they were not univerſally diſpoſed to believe in his ſon. Monotheiſm might indiſpoſe them to the goſpel, as well as their attachment to the law of MOSES. The expectation of the Meſſiah did not claſh

* Reaſ. of Chriſ.

with

with monotheiſm. But they might imagine, that the belief of God the ſon, and God the holy Ghoſt did ſo very manifeſtly; the trinity not having been early reconciled to the unity of God. Other nations ſeemed to be better prepared by philoſophy, by that of PLATO in particular, and by the polytheiſtical notions of divine natures, ſome in the godhead, and ſome out of it, for the reception of the goſpel, or of the theology which the preachers of the goſpel taught. Accordingly we find, that when CHRIST came, and threw down the wall of partition, if he did throw it down, and not St. PAUL, the miracles wrought to propagate chriſtianity had greater effect out of Judaea than in it. On the whole matter, it is impoſſible to conceive, on grounds of human reaſon, to what purpoſe a divine oeconomy, relative to the coming of CHRIST, ſhould have confined the knowledge of the true God to the Jews, and have left the reſt of mankind without God in the world. On the other ſide, if men diſcovered the Creator of all things by their obſervations and their reaſonings, things muſt have paſſed much as the memorials of antient times give us grounds to believe that they did paſs. The knowledge of the true God muſt have been uncertainly propagated, and uncertainly maintained; it muſt have been never loſt, but always liable to be darkened by too much ignorance and ſtupidity in ſome, and too much imaginary knowledge, and the endleſs refinements of opinion in others.

THAT our Saviour found the whole world in a ſtate of error concerning this firſt principle of natural religion, tho not of abſolute darkneſs, is allowed; and that the ſpreading of chriſtianity has contributed to deſtroy polytheiſm and idolatry is true. But that, which Mr. LOCKE advances to have been the conſequence of this great event, is not true. It is not true, that God has been made known to the world by this revelation, with ſuch evidence and energy, that polytheiſm and idolatry have been no where able to with-

withſtand it. On the contrary, orthodox theiſm has not prevailed in ſome countries where it has been taught. In others, chriſtianity has been eſtabliſhed on the ruins of polytheiſm and idolatry, and has been rooted up again in its turn. Revelation has had no better ſucceſs than reaſon. Neither has been able to preſerve the purity of the doctrines they taught, nor an uniformity in the practice they preſcribed. Nay mahometiſm, a religion inſtituted by an arabian free-booter, who impoſed himſelf for a prophet of God, and compoſed that extravagant rhapſody of ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm, the Koran, has been further propagated than chriſtianity, and that not by the ſword alone, no more than chriſtianity. MAHOMET and the firſt caliphs eſtabliſhed their religion by the ſucceſs and terror of their arms. But ſince that time it has been extended by ſpiritual conqueſts, and not only the conquered, but the conquerors, for ſuch the Turks were, have embraced it. CHRIST, his apoſtles, and the firſt preachers of chriſtianity, eſtabliſhed this religion by their miracles, and by their ſufferings. But ſince that time it has been propagated and preſerved by violence as great, at leaſt, as that which the Saracens employed to eſtabliſh the other. But however, and by what means ſoever, theſe religions have been extended, that of MAHOMET has taught the unity of God in terms ſo clear, and ſo preciſe, as to leave no room for any opinions that may be ſo much as ſtrained into polytheiſm; and has ſo effectually baniſhed all kinds of images, that the moſt groſs and ſuperſtitious of the vulgar cannot have the leaſt occaſion of ſliding into idolatry.

CHRIST found the world in darkneſs and error. But if he was to come again, would he not find it in the ſame ſtate? Would he find even the religion he came to eſtabliſh, either practiſed, or even taught in its genuine purity? Would he not find the decalogue ſhortened, and the creed lengthened, by ſome Chriſtians? Would he not find the creed ſhortened by others, who

who left the decalogue of the ſame ſize, even by Mr. LOCKE himſelf? Chriſtianity has been from the inſtitution of it in a perpetual flux, not relatively to certain opinions alone, that may be deemed indifferent, or not quite eſſential; but relatively to fundamental articles, on which the whole ſyſtem leans. Let me produce one inſtance, which will illuſtrate, and confirm, what has been ſaid againſt thoſe who take ſo much pains to make us believe, that polytheiſm and idolatry prevailed among the nations of the world from the beginning. Arianiſm had very nearly prevailed in the chriſtian church. It was all that intrigue could do to check, and all that wars and perſecutions, wherein millions periſhed, could do to extirpate this hereſy. Let us ſuppoſe now that theſe ſalutary methods had proved ineffectual, and that the orthodox faith was at this time creeping about in corners, as the arian faith actually is, and was preſerved only by a few rational and thinking men, who were fain, in their outward profeſſion and worſhip, to go with the herd, and to keep to the religion eſtabliſhed by law; I aſk, would it be fair to conclude, that the orthodox faith had never been the faith of the chriſtian church, and that this abominable hereſy had been eſtabliſhed from the beginning? It would not be ſo moſt certainly. To recapitulate, therefore, and to conclude: I think it plain, that the knowledge and worſhip of the one true God muſt have been the religion of mankind for a long time, if the moſaical hiſtory be authentic, and was not therefore confined from the beginning to the family of SEM, nor to the Iſraelites who pretended to be of it. I think it plain, that the aſſumed confinement of this orthodox faith and worſhip could anſwer no imaginable deſign of a divine oeconomy, preparatory to the coming of CHRIST; ſince the Jews, who had it, were not better prepared than the Gentiles, who are ſaid not to have had it, to receive and embrace the goſpel; and ſince this doctrine was propagated much more by heathen philoſophers

loſophers than by Jewiſh doctors. I think it plain, that if we ſuppoſe the unity of God to have been diſcovered by reaſon, and to have been propagated by human authority merely, the belief of it muſt have gone thro all the viciſſitudes, and have been expoſed to all the corruptions that appear to have attended it. I add, that we have the leſs reaſon to be ſurpriſed at this, or to doubt of it, ſince we ſee that very faith, which God himſelf came on earth to publiſh, which was confirmed by miracles, and recorded by divine inſpiration, ſubject to the ſame viciſſitudes, and the ſame corruptions.

ESSAY THE FOURTH:

CONCERNING

AUTHORITY

IN MATTERS OF

RELIGION.

ESSAY THE FOURTH.

SECTION I.

ALL men are apt to have an high conceit of their own underſtandings, and to be tenacious of the opinions they profeſs; and yet almoſt all men are guided by the underſtandings of others, not by their own, and may be ſaid more truly to adopt, than to beget, their opinions. Nurſes, parents, paedagogues, and after them all, and above them all, that univerſal paedagogue cuſtom, fill the mind with notions which it had no ſhare in framing, which it receives as paſſively, as it receives the impreſſions of outward objects, and which, left to itſelf, it would never have framed perhaps, or would have examined afterwards. Thus prejudices are eſtabliſhed by education, and habits by cuſtom. We are taught to think what others think, not how to think for ourſelves; and whilſt the memory is loaded, the underſtanding remains unexerciſed, or exerciſed in ſuch trammels as conſtrain it's motions, and direct it's pace, till that which was artificial becomes in ſome ſort natural, and the mind can go no other.

WRONG notions, and falſe principles, begot in this manner by authority, may be called properly enough the baſtards of the mind; and yet they are nurſed, and preſerved by it as if they were the legitimate iſſue; Nay they are even deemed to be ſo by the mind itſelf. The mind grows fond of them accordingly, and this miſtaken application of ſelf-love makes men zealous to defend, and propagate them by the ſame kind

of authority, and by every other ſort of impoſition. Thus they are perpetuated, and as they contract the ruſt of antiquity they grow to be more reſpected. The fact that was delivered at firſt on very ſuſpicious teſtimony, becomes indiſputable; and the opinion that was ſcarce problematical becomes a demonſtrated propoſition. Nor is this at all wonderful. We look at original, thro intermediate authority, and it appears greater and better than it is really, juſt as objects of ſight are ſometimes magnified by an hazy medium. Men who would have been deemed ignorant, or mad, or knaviſh, if they had been our cotemporaries, are reverenced as prodigies of learning, of wiſdom, and of virtue, becauſe they lived many centuries ago. When their writings come down to poſterity, poſterity might judge indeed of their characters on better grounds than report and tradition: but the ſame authority, which ſhewed them in a half light, ſcreens them in a full one. Paraphraſes and commentaries accompany their writings. Their miſtakes are excuſed, their contradictions are ſeemingly reconciled, their abſurdities are varniſhed over, their puerilities are repreſented as marks of a moſt amiable ſimplicity, their enthuſiaſtical rants as the language of the moſt ſublime genius, or even of inſpiration; and as this is frequently done with much ſkillful plauſibility, ſo it is always aided by the ſtrong prepoſſeſſions that have been created in their favor. The firſt traditional authorities that handed down fantaſtic ſcience, and erroneous opinions, might be no better than the original authorities that impoſed them. But they were ſufficient for the time; and when error had once taken root deeply in the minds of men, tho knowledge increaſed, and reaſon was better cultivated, yet they ſerved principally to defend and embelliſh it. Truths, that have been diſcovered in the moſt inlightened ages and countries, have been by ſuch means as theſe ſo blended with the errors of the darkeſt, that the whole maſs of learning, which

we

we boaſt of at this hour, muſt be ſeparated, and ſifted at great expence, like the ore of a poor mine; and like that too, will hardly pay the coſts.

It may ſound oddly, but it is true in many caſes to ſay, that if men had learned leſs, their way to knowledge would be ſhorter and eaſier. It is indeed ſhorter and eaſier to proceed from ignorance to knowledge, than from error. They who are in the laſt, muſt unlearn before they can learn to any good purpoſe; and the firſt part of this double taſk is not in many reſpects the leaſt difficult, for which reaſon it is ſeldom undertaken. The vulgar, under which denomination we muſt rank, on this occaſion, almoſt all the ſons of Adam, content themſelves to be guided by vulgar opinions. They know little, and believe much. They examine and judge for themſelves in the common affairs of life ſometimes, and not always even in theſe. But the greateſt and the nobleſt objects of the human mind are very tranſiently, at beſt, the objects of theirs. On all theſe, they reſign themſelves to the authority that prevails among the men with whom they live. Some of them want the means, all of them want the will, to do more; and as abſurd as this may appear in ſpeculation, it is beſt, perhaps, upon the whole, the human nature and the nature of government conſidered, that it ſhould be as it is.

Scholars and philoſophers will demand to be excepted out of the vulgar, in this ſenſe. But they have not a juſt claim to be ſo excepted. They profeſs to ſeek truth without any other regard; and yet the taſk of unlearning error is too hard for them. They ſet out in this ſearch with the ſame prejudices, and the ſame habits that they who neglect it have, and they lean on authority in more caſes than the others. If they improve and employ their reaſon more, it is only to degrade her

the more; for they employ her always in ſubordination to another guide, and never truſt themſelves wholly to her conduct, even when authority cannot have the appearance of authority without her approbation. The taſk of unlearning error, and laying authority aſide in the ſearch of truth, is not only hard in itſelf, but it becomes harder ſtill by two conſiderations, as it implies a ſelf-denial of vanity, and of ambition. Scholars are oſtentatious of their learning, and tho he who has read much will not arrive at truth ſo ſoon, nor ſo ſurely, as he who has thought much, yet will he make a greater glare, and draw more admiration to himſelf. The man who accumulates authorities of philoſophers, of fathers, and of councils to eſtabliſh an opinion that muſt be founded in reaſon, and be agreeable to the common ſenſe of mankind, or be founded in nothing, is not unlike the child who chooſes a crown in ſeveral pieces of braſs, rather than a guinea in one piece of gold. Thus, again, we muſt not imagine that we behold an example of modeſty and moderation, when we ſee a whole ſect of philoſophers ſubmit to the authority of one, as Pagans, Chriſtians, and Mahometans did in their turns, and for many ages, to that of ARISTOTLE; whilſt they dared to reaſon in no other form, nor on any other principles than thoſe which he had preſcribed. It is in truth an example of rank ambition. Such men, like the ſlaves who domineer in abſolute monarchies, intend by their ſubmiſſion to a ſupreme tyrant to acquire the means of exerciſing tyranny in their turns.

THERE are innumerable caſes in common life, and many in arts and ſciences, wherein we muſt content ourſelves, according to the condition of our nature, with probability, and rely on authority for want of the means, or opportunities, of knowledge. I rely on the authority of my cook, when I eat my ſoup; on the authority of my apothecary, when I take a doſe of

of rhubarb; on that of GRAHAM, when I buy my watch, and on that of Sir ISAAC NEWTON, when I believe in the doctrine of gravitation; becauſe I am neither cook, apothecary, watchmaker, nor mathematician. But I am a rational creature, and am therefore obliged to judge for myſelf in all thoſe caſes where reaſon alone is the judge; the judge of the thing itſelf; for even in the others, reaſon is the judge of the authority. My parſon might reproach me very juſtly with the folly of going thro the journey of life without opening the eyes of my mind, and employing my intellectual Sight. But my parſon grows impertinent when he would perſuade me, like thoſe of your church, to remain in voluntary blindneſs; or like thoſe of ours, to let him ſee for me, tho my eyes are open, tho my faculties of viſion are at leaſt as good as his, and tho I have all the ſame objects of ſight before my eyes that he has before his.

RESIGNATION to authority will appear the more abſurd, if we conſider, that by it we run two riſks inſtead of one. We may deceive ourſelves no doubt. But is the divine, is the philoſopher, infallible? We ſhall not mean to deceive ourſelves moſt certainly. But the divine, or the philoſopher may intend to deceive us. He may find his account in it, and deceit may be his trade. Had theſe men that ſuperiority over others, which ſome of them have aſſumed; did the ſublime objects of divine philoſophy appear to them, tho they do not appear ſo to us, in the effulgence of an immediate and direct light, there would be ſome better reaſon than there is for a dependence on their authority, at leaſt in one reſpect. We might own their knowledge ſufficient to eſtabliſh this authority, whatever we thought of their candor and ſincerity. But God has dealed more equally with his human creatures. There is no ſuch ſuperiority of ſome over others. They who exerciſe their reaſon,

reaſon, and improve their knowledge the moſt, are dazzled and blinded whenever they attempt to look beyond the reflected light wherein it is given us to contemplate the exiſtence, the nature, the attributes, and the will of God relatively to man. They who pretend to face, like ſo many intellectual eagles, the ſun of eternal wiſdom, and to ſee in that abyſs of ſplendor, are ſo truly metaphyſical madmen, that he who attends to them, and relies on them, muſt be mad likewiſe.

The more important any ſubject is, the more reaſon we have to be on our guard againſt the impoſitions and ſeductions of authority, and to judge in the beſt manner we can for ourſelves. The all-wiſe God has diſpoſed the univerſal order ſo, that every man is, by his nature, capable of acquiring a certain and ſufficient knowledge of thoſe things which are the moſt important to him, whilſt he is left to probability and belief about others: and yet ſuch are the contradictions which reconcile themſelves to one another in the heads and hearts of men, that even they who perceive the importance of the ſubject, and are not delivered over by a ſupine neglect to authority, are however deterred by an unreaſonable timidity from the uſe of their own judgments, and are determined by an affection of their minds, in oppoſition to common ſenſe, to deliver themſelves over to the prevalent authority, whatever that be. Thus, they who invade the reaſon of mankind triumph, not by their own ſtrength, but by the prejudices of the invaded. Their ſucceſs may be compared to that of a certain prince who placed, it is ſaid, cats and other animals, adored by the Egyptians, in the front of his army when he invaded that people. A reverence for theſe phantoms made the Egyptians lay down their arms, and become an eaſy conqueſt.

This timidity is the leſs excuſable, becauſe the divine wiſdom, as I hinted above, has been pleaſed to manifeſt to us a rule of inquiry and judgment in matters of divine philoſophy and natural religion, that is ſure, as far as it goes, and it goes moſt certainly as far as the ſame wiſdom intended that our inquiries and judgments ſhould proceed. It ſerves at once both to direct and limit them. God has ſhewn theſe great objects to us in a light reflected from his works, and proportioned to our nature. He has ſhewn them in no other, in the ordinary courſe of his providence. The way therefore to avoid fantaſtical, and to attain ſome degree of real knowledge concerning them, is to apply ourſelves to a careful obſervation of the phaenomena of nature, corporeal, and intellectual, as nature is commonly diſtinguiſhed. The true foundations of natural theology muſt be laid in natural philoſophy. So they have been laid, in part at leaſt, by antient and modern theiſts, and by the latter eſpecially, ſince the wonderful diſcoveries that have been made by the improvement of experimental philoſophy; diſcoveries that might ſend the wiſeſt men of antiquity, ſacred and prophane, could they ariſe from the dead with all their wiſdom and all their learning about them, once more to ſchool.

The foundations * of theiſm have been laid wider, but they wanted no ſolidity before theſe diſcoveries. Theſe new proofs,

* This note is added a great number of years after I had written what is contained in the text referred to, and after my opinions concerning the Supreme Being, and the proofs of his exiſtence had been eſtabliſhed in my mind; becauſe I have lately found, in the hiſtory of the royal academy of ſciences at Berlin for the year 1746, a diſſertation written by a very ingenious man, a very good philoſopher, and one with whom I have been long acquainted, that I cannot approve on many accounts. His avowed deſign is to deduce the proofs of God's exiſtence from the general,

proofs, nay all proofs beyond thoſe which every obſerving man is able to draw even from an unphiloſophical view of the ſyſtem

general, not any particular laws of nature, and to deduce thoſe of motion and reſt metaphyſically from the attributes of the ſupreme intelligence.

To make way for this proof, he rejects or endeavours to weaken every other proof, on this pretence, that the attempt to eſtabliſh truth on falſe reaſonings is the greateſt injury which can be done to it. I ſhall not take on me to examine his hypotheſis, how little ſoever I like the deduction of a phyſical hypotheſis from metaphyſical principles, inſtead of eſtabliſhing general, abſtract, or, if you pleaſe, metaphyſical axioms on particular experiments and obſervation.

Mr. Maupertuis lays no weight on the famous argument of Des Cartes taken from the idea of an infinite, all-perfect Being, which he ſuppoſes to be in the human mind; and Maupertuis is in the right. He ſays little on the aſſumed univerſal conſent of mankind to this great and fundamental truth, and he is not in the wrong. This conſent is not ſuch as it ſtands repreſented by many. It is general enough to ſhew the proportion which this truth bears to the univerſal reaſon of mankind, and I think it would prove no more if it was ſtill more general. The actual exiſtence of ſuch a Being cannot be fairly deduced from it. He will not inſiſt, he ſays, on the argument which may be drawn from the intelligence whereof we are conſcious, to a firſt intelligence, infinite, and eternal, which is the original of all intelligence, and the firſt cauſe of all things; and yet I apprehend that he has given us none ſo good by the help of metaphyſics, and mathematics, as this, which is plain and obvious to the conception of every rational creature.

That ſome theiſts have reaſoned weakly from the phaenomena of nature to the exiſtence of God is, I believe, true, as I am ſure it is true that others would have made the doctrine of final cauſes ridiculous, if any thing could make it ſo, by the ridiculous application of it on every unworthy and trifling occaſion. But we muſt not learn from hence to deſpiſe all thoſe arguments which antient philoſophers drew from the beauty, order, and diſpoſition of the univerſe, on this ſmart conceit, that they knew too little of nature to have a right to admire it.

He is not ſatisfied neither with thoſe which Newton, and much leſs with thoſe which other naturaliſts have drawn from the ſame phaenomena. If he cites thoſe of Newton, it is only to ſhew how weak and inconcluſive even theſe are. Newton thought that the uniform motion of the planets proved itſelf neceſſarily to have been directed by choice, not by chance, and he ſhews the great probability of this doctrine. But then he thinks there remains probability enough on the other ſide, to hinder us from ſaying that this uniformity muſt have been neceſſarily the effect of choice, tho it ſhould be granted, agreeably to Newton's ſyſtem, that all the celeſtial bodies being drawn towards the ſun, move in a vacuum. On the other hand he advances, that the force of Newton's argument being founded alone on the impoſſibility

tem of nature, are proofs " ex abundantiâ." I honor moſt ſincerely thoſe philoſophers who have endeavoured to raiſe the thoughts

poſſibility of aſſigning a phyſical cauſe of this uniformity in his hypotheſis, it will have no force with other philoſophers. The uniformity of theſe motions will not appear inexplicable to thoſe who admit a fluid matter, in which the planets are hurried round, or by which their motion is moderated. On this foot we are not reduced to the alternative of ſuppoſing either chance, or choice, and ſuch an uniformity of motion will prove the exiſtence of God no more than any other motion impreſſed on matter. This MAUPERTUIS ſays. But till the phyſical cauſe of the uniform motion of the planets has been explained intelligibly by the hypotheſis of a fluid, we muſt remain where we were, and have recourſe in one caſe, as well as in the other, to choice, or chance.

THIS philoſopher thinks that the argument, drawn by NEWTON from the formation of animals, has no more ſtrength than the former. He aſks, whether, if the uniformity of ſome be a proof on one ſide, the infinite variety of others will not be a proof on the other ſide? Now ſurely theſe proofs are ſo far from being contradictory, that they coincide. The eagle, the fly, the ſtag, the ſnail, the whale, and the oiſter are very different animals no doubt; and the immenſe variety of the different ſpecies of animals appropriated to different elements, and purpoſes, diſplays the magnificence of the animal world, and the infinite power of it's author, as the uniformity of all thoſe of the ſame ſpecies ſhews the deſign and wiſdom of that Being who created them, and appropriated them to the ſame elements, and to the ſame purpoſes. When we compare an eagle to a fly, we find a proof of one. When we compare an eagle to an eagle, we find a proof of the other. In ſhort the objection is founded in cavil, not in argument.

MR. MAUPERTUIS proceeds, and admits, but admits as if it were for argument's ſake alone, that the proportion of the different parts and organs of animals to their wants, carries a more ſolid appearance; and he judges that they reaſon very ill, who aſſert that the uſes, to which theſe parts and organs are applied, were not the final cauſes of them, but that they are ſo applied, becauſe the animal is ſo made. Chance gave eyes and ears, and ſince we have them, we make uſe of them to ſee and hear. He thinks however it may be ſaid, that, chance having produced an immenſe number of individuals, thoſe of them, whoſe parts and organs were proportioned to their wants, have ſubſiſted, whilſt thoſe who wanted this proportion have periſhed, and diſappeared. Thoſe who had no mouth, for inſtance, could not eat, and live; thoſe who wanted the organs of generation could not perpetuate their ſpecies: and thus from the preſent ſtate of things theiſts draw an argument, which will appear fallacious, when it is applied to the poſſible original of things.

To ridicule the proofs of this kind, he aſks, a little too triumphantly, what it ſignifies to diſcover appearances of order and proportion, if after this diſcovery we are ſtopped in our reaſoning by ſome untoward concluſion? He inſtances in the

thoughts of men, by theſe diſcoveries, from the phaenomena up to the author of nature, inſtead of amuſing the world, like

ſerpent, who can neither walk, nor fly, and yet ſaves himſelf from the purſuit of other animals by the flexibility of his body, which enables him to crawl away faſter than many of them can follow him. The cold of the winter would chill him to death, if the form of his body, and the ſlippery ſmoothneſs of his ſkin, did not enable him likewiſe to creep thro holes that hide him under the ground. This is the diſcovery. The untoward concluſion follows, and he aſks, to what purpoſe does all this ſerve? Why truly to none but the preſervation of an animal, whoſe bite is ſufficient to kill a man. Thus the philoſopher endeavours to deſtroy one proof of God's exiſtence, by begging the ſame queſtion as the divine begs, when he would prove that God is unjuſt, becauſe there is either phyſical, or moral evil in the world; that is, by aſſuming man to be the final cauſe of the creation.

The great and reſpectable perſons, ſuch as father Malebranche, whoſe authority Maupertuis cites againſt the order obſerved in the conſtruction of the univerſe, and who were at a loſs to comprehend how it could be the work of a Being infinitely wiſe and powerful, built their objections on the ſame aſſumption, and ran, as he obſerves, into many abſurd ſyſtems. But I wave entering any farther here into the conſideration of this aſſumption, and the uſe that is made of it, ſince I have taken occaſion to ſpeak fully about it in another place.

The criticiſm he makes on that expreſſion which cloſes the firſt of Mr. Pope's ethic epiſtles, "whatever is, is right," cannot be maintained. The propoſition is not advanced as an argument to prove the exiſtence of God, nor as a profeſſion of faith, "un acte de foi." I preſume Mr. Pope meaned it as a reaſonable conſequence of what he ſuppoſed already proved, and that when deſign and wiſdom were ſo evidently marked in all the works of God which are objects of human obſervation and knowledge, it became his creatures to conclude that the ſame wiſdom and deſign were employed in the whole, tho human obſervation and knowledge cannot reach to the whole, and therefore that he was juſtified, as he was moſt certainly, in pronouncing that "whatever is, is right." To ſay that this axiom tends to ſubmit all things to a fatal neceſſity, is not true. To ſay that it eſtabliſhes ſubmiſſion and reſignation to the divine providence, in oppoſition to the pride and preſumption of philoſophers and divines, is true. It is a truth which no man ſhould be aſhamed to own, and which every rational creature ſhould be aſhamed to contradict.

Maupertuis himſelf admits enough to eſtabliſh this truth, when he admits that intelligence and deſign are perceivable in a multitude of the phaenomena; and yet he does not give up the point. It is not enough, he ſays, to prove intelligence and deſign. To prove the wiſdom of God, we muſt penetrate into the objects to which this intelligence and deſign were directed. Ability in the execution is inſufficient. To ſhew his wiſdom, we muſt prove his motives to have been reaſonable. To what purpoſe do we admire that regularity with which all the planets move the ſame way, almoſt

like many others, with metaphyſical abſtractions. But yet I think, that we wanted neither a BOYLE, nor a RAY, nor a DERHAM, nor a NEWYNTIT to convince us of the ſelf-exiſtence of an intelligent Being, the firſt cauſe of all things; and I am ſure that we are much to blame if we want a BENTLEY, or a CLARKE, to put us in mind, for in truth they do no more, of the exiſtence of ſuch a Being. In ſhort, natural theology reſts on better foundation than authority of any kind, and the duties of natural religion, and the ſins againſt it, are held out to us by the conſtitution of our nature, and by daily experience, in characters ſo viſible, that he who runs may read them.

THESE revelations, for ſuch they may be properly called, are made to the reaſon of mankind; and the ſame reaſon that collects them from the face of nature, is able to propagate the knowledge of them, and to find means of enforcing, as far as the general imperfection of our nature, and particular contingent circumſtances admit, a conduct ſuitable to them. But men have not been contented to do this. They have imagined, or they have found in the frailty of the human nature, and the imperfection of the human ſtate, an apparent neceſſity of going farther; of adding art to nature, falſhood to truth, and their own inventions for divine communications. In order to make the impoſition paſs, they have ſet authority in the place of reaſon. The religion of nature, and therefore of the God of na-

almoſt in the ſame plane, and in orbits nearly alike, if we do not ſee that it is better that they ſhould move ſo than otherwiſe, that is, if we have not diſcovered the ſufficient reaſon that LEIBNITZ requires in all caſes where things may be done more ways than one? A reaſonable man may content himſelf, without this ſufficient reaſon, in many caſes, and LEIBNITZ blundered grievouſly when he pretended to have found it in ſome. I doubt MAUPERTUIS has not ſucceeded better, in deducing the firſt and univerſal laws of nature from the attributes of an all-wiſe, and all-powerful Being, in order to ſhew, that ſince theſe laws, which are obſerved in the univerſe, are the very ſame which ſuch attributes muſt have produced, ſuch a Being muſt exiſt, and be the author of theſe laws. Happily we have no want of this demonſtration.

ture, is ſimple and plain; it tells us nothing which our reaſon is unable to comprehend, and much leſs any thing which is repugnant to it. Natural religion and reaſon are always agreed, they are always the ſame, and the whole oeconomy of God's diſpenſations to man is of a piece. But religions, founded in the pretended revelations we ſpeak of here, grow voluminous and myſterious, oppoſe belief to knowledge, and when they cannot ſtand a reaſonable examination, eſcape from reaſon by aſſuming that they are above it. Many ſuch religions have appeared in the world. We Chriſtians reject them all, not only becauſe they carry moſt evident marks of impoſture, but becauſe there can be no more than one true revelation, and that is undoubtedly the revelation we acknowledge; for chooſing of which however, and for rejecting the others, we muſt confeſs that we had no reaſon at all, or we muſt confeſs that the truth of a revelation is an object of reaſon, and to be tried by it.

Religions, inſtituted by men who thought themſelves inſpired when they were only mad, or by men who were thought to be inſpired when they were only cheats, reſt on the mere authority of their founder, maintained and improved by his diſciples, and their ſucceſſors. Reaſon had no ſhare in examining the original pretended revelation, nor has much in examining the deſcent of the tradition that preſerves it. How could reaſon have any ſhare in examining and controuling the firſt, on which the laſt, and all the conſequences of an impoſture depend, among men ignorant and credulous, or who were prepared by ſuperſtition to believe revelation no uncommon event? The enthuſiaſt was not enough in his ſenſes to reflect, that in order to be aſſured he had a revelation from God, it was neceſſary he ſhould have not only a lively inward ſentiment of the divine truth that he ſuppoſed revealed to him, but alſo a clear and diſtinct

diſtinct perception of the time and manner in which this ſupernatural operation was performed. The impoſtor was enough in his ſenſes to know, that no one was able to prove he had not the revelations he pretended to have; becauſe no man is able any more to perceive the perceptions of another man's mind, however occaſioned, than to ſee an outward object by the eyes, or to hear a ſound by the ears, of another. Believers in men of both theſe characters were never wanting; and far from examining, it became a merit not to examine.

He ſaid it, was foundation enough for an article of faith in the pythagorean religion; and the ſame proof was ſufficient to eſtabliſh the religion of Foe that began in India, was propagated into China, and ſpread in ſeveral ſects all over the Eaſt. The ſame obſervation may be made on other religions that have been impoſed by the force of authority, no matter how acquired, on ignorant and ſuperſtitious people at firſt, and on thoſe of more ſenſe and knowledge, when the authority was grown too ſtrong to be ſhaken. But chriſtianity was not ſo impoſed; and nothing can be more plain than this, that God ſubmitted the authority of his revelation at the time he gave it, and therefore at every later time much more, to the reaſon of the creatures to whom he gave it.

When we conſider the great and glorious purpoſes of this revelation, the manner in which, and the perſon, even the ſon of God himſelf, by whom it was made, and all the ſtupendous miracles in the heavens, and on earth, that were wrought to confirm it, we are ready to conclude that ſuch a revelation muſt have left reaſon nothing to do, muſt have forced conviction, and have taken away even the poſſibility of doubt. This conſequence ſeems ſo neceſſary, that if ſuch events were ſtated hypothetically, the hypotheſis would be rejected as defective and

and inconſiſtent, unleſs they were ſuppoſed to have had their full effect; and yet in fact, an univerſal ſubmiſſion of all thoſe who were witneſſes of the ſigns and wonders that accompanied the publication of the goſpel, did not follow. The learned men among the Jews, the ſcribes, the phariſees, the rulers of the people, were perſecutors of chriſtianity, not converts to it; and the vulgar, as well as they, were ſo far from believing JESUS to be the Meſſiah their nation expected, or any divine perſon ſent by God, that when PILATE inclined to ſave him, inſtead of BARABBAS a notorious criminal, the whole crowd cried out, "let his blood be on us and our children," and inſiſted, with a ſort of mutinous zeal, on his execution.

WHAT are we to ſay now? The Jew will inſiſt that the miracles might be ſuch as they are reported to have been, but that if they were ſuch, they were wrought by the powers of magic, like thoſe of APOLLONIUS of Thyana; or by ſome ſecret charm like that of the true pronunciation of the name that conſiſted of four letters, the famous tetragrammaton; and that his anceſtors had reaſon therefore to reject the proofs drawn from them, inſtead of believing, that the God of truth had ſet his ſeal, as it were, to an impoſture. The infidel will inſiſt, that all theſe miracles were equivocal at beſt, ſuch as credulous ſuperſtitious perſons, and none elſe believed, ſuch as were frequently and univerſally impoſed by the firſt fathers of the chriſtian church, and as are ſo ſtill by their ſucceſſors, whereever ignorance or ſuperſtition abound. He will apply to miracles, what BESSARION ſaid of ſaints, and bid us judge of the antient by the modern. Thus will theſe men account for the little ſucceſs which the goſpel had, on the firſt publication of it: little, I mean, when compared with the authority of the preacher, whoſe divinity was ſufficiently manifeſted under the diſguiſe of humanity.

SECT-

SECTION II.

But I aſk, what now will a good and reaſonable Chriſtian ſay? He will not alledge, I think, that the Jews were rejected, and the Gentiles called in: ſince his two antagoniſts would be ready to anſwer, that he ſet the effect in the place of the cauſe, and the cauſe of the effect, when he aſſumed, that the Jews refuſed to believe in the miracles and goſpel of Christ, becauſe they were rejected, inſtead of aſſuming that they were rejected becauſe of their unbelief. Would he follow the example that has been ſet on other occaſions? Would he reaſon from his notions, well or ill abſtracted, of order, and of the fitneſſes and unfitneſſes of things to the conduct of God, call this reaſoning demonſtration, and when he found the phaenomena ſtand in oppoſition to it, as they would do evidently in the preſent caſe, ſince that univerſality of ſubmiſſion to the ſon of God was not paid, which ought to have been paid, according to all our ideas of order and fitneſs, would he have recourſe to ſome bungling hypotheſis to reconcile them? If he took this method, it would happen to him as it has happened to divines very often: he would ſtrengthen the objection of the infidel, and not be able to ſolve it afterwards.

An end to which the means are not proportioned can never be the end of infinite wiſdom, ſeconded by infinite power. The means employed to eſtabliſh and maintain the goſpel have not been ſufficient to do it independently of reaſon, and by the mere force of authority, from the firſt publication of it. The end and deſign therefore of infinite wiſdom was not to ſubject human reaſon, how much ſoever it was in fact ſubjected by the firſt converts, to a revelation received implicitely, even on the authority of the ſon of God himſelf, and much leſs on any other.

Reaſon

Reaſon was made ſo neceſſary to judge of this revelation, even at the time it was given, that if we ſuppoſe ourſelves tranſported back to that time, and inquiring into the truth of this revelation on the very ſpot where it was made, we ſhall find, that far from being determined by authority in favor of it, our reaſon would have had much to do in comparing the various and contradictory teſtimonies, and in ballancing the degrees of probability that reſulted from them. The conteſt between the firſt witneſſes of chriſtian revelation, and the reſt of the Jews who witneſſed againſt it, became a party conteſt, carried on with great zeal on the perſecuted ſide, and great cruelty on the other. They diſputed not only about the miracles that had been wrought, and were daily working among them, even about that deciſive concluding miracle the reſurrection of JESUS, but about the interpretation of their prophecies, which foretold the coming of the Meſſiah, and about the application of them to him. In ſuch a confuſed ſtate of things, on whoſe authority could any honeſt inquirer have depended? If he had weighed, or if he had counted ſuffrages, he would have been equally determined againſt the truth; and upon the whole he muſt have deſpaired of coming to a determination at all by any other way than that of employing the utmoſt ſagacity of his mind, and judging for himſelf, unleſs it had pleaſed God to make him ſome particular revelation.

THIS advantage St. PAUL boaſted that he had. The miracles of CHRIST and of his diſciples made ſo little impreſſion on him, tho he had not only heard of them all, but had been an eye-witneſs, at leaſt, of that which appeared when St. STEPHEN was ſtoned to death, that he ſignaliſed his zeal againſt chriſtianity till he himſelf became the ſubject of a moſt miraculous operation, and was called upon by JESUS in a ſhort, but very

very pathetic expoſtulation *. In this manner he was converted; and in this manner every inhabitant of the earth, Jew or Gentile, learned or ignorant, might have been converted, as well as he. But it was not in the plan of providence to employ the immediate, particular, miraculous, and therefore irreſiſtible authority of revelation in many caſes: and all other authority, even that of miracles, occaſionally wrought before ſome, and reported by others, being inadequate to univerſal conviction, the generality of men were left to embrace chriſtianity or not, as their reaſon, right or wrong, weak or ſtrong, ſhould direct, and reaſon not being ſubdued by revelation, revelation was ſubjected to reaſon. St. PAUL was not in this caſe: his reaſon had been ſubdued effectually. But he dealed with other men as being in it. He argued, he expoſtulated, he appealed to their reaſon principally. He worked, indeed, now and then a miracle, as it was given him to work them; for his caſe in this reſpect may be compared to that, which a divine of the faculty of Paris, whom I have quoted elſewhere, aſſumed to be the caſe of all thoſe who wrote the books of the old teſtament. One ſeemed to have had inſpirations, and the others a power of working miracles occaſionally, not conſtantly. PAUL, therefore, appealed chiefly to the reaſon of mankind in his ſeveral miſſions. On two of theſe miſſions, at leaſt, it may be to our preſent purpoſe to make ſome reflection.

HE preached at Antioch to the Jews and to the Gentiles: the former contradicted him, diſputed with him, and raiſed a perſecution againſt him and his companion BARNABAS. The apoſtles worked no miracles on this occaſion, like men who knew how ineffectual the authority they procured was, for the moſt part, in the then ordinary exerciſe of that power. The laſt recourſe was to reaſon: and when that failed, the apoſtles

* Acts of the Apoſt. ch. ix.

turned themſelves from the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were more docile, and free from the prejudices of the Jews about their prophecies, which only ſerved to miſlead them: reaſon had more effect on theſe; they rejoiced, they glorified the word of God, and they believed, that is, as many of them as were preordained to eternal life *; for it would ſeem, by this paſſage, that neither authority, nor reaſon, nor miracles, nor all theſe together were ſufficient to make men proſelytes to chriſtianity without a previous deſignation, and divine election †. Let us follow St. Paul from Antioch to Rome, where he ſucceeded a little better among the Jews. Thoſe of Aſia looked upon him as an apoſtate, and were the more averſe to chriſtianity, perhaps, for his preaching it. But the Jews at Rome had no prejudices againſt him, tho he was brought thither in chains. They had received no letters about him from Judaea; no one who came from thence had ſpoke any evil of him. They had heard, indeed, of a new ſect which was every where oppoſed, and they were deſirous to know his opinion of it §. They took a day to hear him, and they heard him with remarkable patience, for they heard him from morning to night. He was full of the holy ghoſt, he argued from the law of Moses, from the prophets, and from every other topic, as we may aſſure ourſelves, and omitted nothing that might perſuade them to embrace the goſpel. What was the effect? Some believed, and ſome believed not. The ſame may be obſerved of his proceeding at Theſſalonica. He

* Credidêrunt quotquot erant praeordinati ad vitam aeternam. Act. c. xiii.

† N. B. The opinion that God acts with men by arbitrary will, and by virtue of his abſolute ſovereignty over his creatures being once eſtabliſhed; and in conſequence of it, the doctrines of election, reprobation, and an eternal predeſtination; much of what has been ſaid falls to the ground. Miracles were as ſuperfluous as reaſon, where ſpecial grace was to operate, and both inſignificant, where it was not to operate. I own myſelf unable to reconcile theſe apparent inconſiſtencies, and I leave that taſk to others.

§ Acts ch. xxviii.

went

went into the ſynagogue, he worked no miracles, but he reaſoned with the Jews three ſabbath days, &c.

To conclude on this head then, it is plain that the firſt publiſhers of chriſtianity did not reſt the cauſe primarily, or ſolely, on authority of any kind. It is plain that they ſubmitted the goſpel, and the authority of thoſe who publiſhed it, to the examination of reaſon, as any other ſyſtem even of divine philoſophy ought to be ſubmitted. The conſequence was, that it prevailed, as other religions have done, and not with that univerſal aſſent which might have been expected from a religion given by God himſelf, and given to all the ſons of men; from a revelation, their belief in which was to decide their eternal happineſs or miſery, and which omnipotence could have impoſed as eaſily on all as on ſome, if infinite wiſdom had ſo deſigned. Right reaſon is always on the ſide of truth: it is truth, and can never differ from itſelf. But right and wrong reaſon, the bona and mala ratio of Cotta, being nothing elſe than the reſult of a right and wrong uſe of our faculties, it is no wonder the imperfection of theſe faculties, and the prejudices and ſeductions to which we are expoſed being conſidered, that the wrong takes often the place of the right, and paſſes for it. Why the natural order of things was preſerved thus far in the caſe of a ſupernatural diſpenſation, why ſo many particular miracles were wrought ineffectually to the general avowed deſign of this revelation, and why the divine authority of it was not manifeſted to all concerned in it, that is, to all mankind, as the divine authority of the law was manifeſted to all concerned in it, that is, to all the Iſraelites, let us not preſume to gueſs. In this manner chriſtianity was firſt promulgated; and in this manner, therefore, it was right and fit that chriſtianity ſhould be promulgated.

But now, ſince the prerogative of reaſon was thus eſtabliſhed over revelation originally, it is proper we ſhould inquire how far this prerogative extends now, and whether it be leſſened, or increaſed, by length of time. In order to this divines teach, that we muſt diſtinguiſh between the external and internal evidences of the truth, and divinity, of the chriſtian revelation; by which I mean the teſtimony brought to prove the fact, that this revelation was made by God, and the character of the doctrines contained in it, whether worthy or unworthy, of a divine original. If they can eſtabliſh the fact ſufficiently, the ſecond attempt ſeems little neceſſary; but it is for the honor of chriſtianity to ſtand ſuch examinations, as every pretended revelation declines; and our divines themſelves exhort us ſo to examine; tho it muſt be confeſſed, that when the reſult of our examination is not ſtrictly conformable to the doctrines they teach, they damn us for examining, according to that abſurd prerogative which they exerciſe frequently of advancing general propoſitions, and of condemning them in particular inſtances. Let us not be ſo abſurd. He who examines in a manner to ſhew, that whilſt he refuſes ſubmiſſion to the authority of man, as if it was that of God, he is careful not to reject the authority of God, as if it were that of man, does much more ſervice to chriſtianity than he who reſolves all into authority, and builds his religion on his faith, inſtead of building his faith on his religion; that is, than he who aſſents to facts and doctrines, and a whole ſyſtem of religion implicitely, without an examination of any part of it, inſtead of believing things that he can neither comprehend, nor examine, on the foundation of thoſe which he comprehends, and has examined.

Of the two ſorts of evidence that have been mentioned, the external comes firſt under examination; for nothing can be more

more ridiculous than that which has happened very often to philoſophers and learned men, to examine the cauſes of things, to deſcant profoundly on their nature, and after that to find that the exiſtence of theſe things was doubtful, or the non-exiſtence certain. One of your divines would urge the authority of the church on this occaſion, as ſufficient to ſupply the want of any other proof, and to fill up the meaſure of probability, which he would call certainty. But he would urge it moſt abſurdly, ſince he would prove in a circle the authority of the church by that of the ſcriptures, and the authority of the ſcriptures by that of the church. One of our proteſtant divines who unite in oppoſition to the authority of your church, and would be glad to erect an authority very like to it each in his own, would mince the matter a little, would rather inſinuate than aſſert ſuch an authority, and rather perſuade than demand ſubmiſſion to it. He would allow, that in the full latitude of evangelical liberty, you have a right to examine the teſtimony in favor of chriſtianity. But he would attempt at the ſame time to ſhew you, that it is much more eaſy, and full as ſafe to rely on the authority of ſo many pious, judicious, and learned men as have made it the buſineſs of their lives to examine the teſtimonies of this revelation, and have agreed to affirm the validity of them.

Neither of theſe divines however would be ſo ridiculous, I think, as to deny that the external evidence of chriſtian revelation has been diminiſhed by time. They would own, that it has been ſo by the loſs of many proofs, whereof time and accidents have deprived us. But I am apt to ſuſpect, that if time and accidents had been more impartial, and had conveyed down to us all the proofs that were brought for it and againſt it, tho proofs would have been more abundant, the evidence would not have been greater, and we ſhould be puz-

led

led as much by contradictory, as we are by ſcanty, proofs. We have indeed the concurrent teſtimony of the ſacred writers, and it has been aſked, whether we have not as much knowledge of them as we have of ſeveral prophane writers whoſe hiſtories paſs for authentic? it has been ſaid too by ſome of thoſe, who corrupt oftener than they correct the text of antient authors, that it is by a multitude of various readings, and of critical emendations, that theſe authors have been reſtored. But the compariſons are by no means juſt; for a different proof is neceſſary of the competency of authors, and a different aſſurance of the ſenſe of their writings, according to the different uſe that is made of the authority. We know that the memorials of men who had been captains in the army of ALEXANDER, and eye-witneſſes of all that paſſed in his famous expedition, were in ſome inſtances different and contradictory. We have reaſon to ſuſpect the veracity of CAESAR in ſome parts of his commentaries; and if we had the commentaries, of LABIENUS, or thoſe of ASINIUS POLLIO, as we have the hiſtory of DION CASSIUS, we ſhould have ſtill more reaſon to ſuſpect, or we ſhould find more proofs, perhaps, of the errors. We read, however, the hiſtories of ARRIAN, and even of QUINTUS CURTIUS, tho we do not know who the latter was; and the commentaries of CAESAR, as authentic hiſtories. Such they are too, for all our purpoſes; and if paſſages which we deem genuine ſhould be ſpurious, if others ſhould be corrupted, or interpolated, and if the authors ſhould have purpoſely, or thro deception, diſguiſed the truth, or advanced untruth, no great hurt would be done. But is this the caſe of the ſcriptures? In them, beſides all the other circumſtances neceſſary to conſtitute hiſtorical probability, it is not enough that the tenor of facts and doctrines be true; the leaſt error is of conſequence. There was a time when the eaſtern and weſtern churches had great diſputes about the proceſſion of the holy ghoſt; whether he proceeded from the father and

the

the ſon, or from the father by the ſon. Theſe diſputes occaſioned much diſorder, tho the difference of a monoſyllable was alone concerned. But other diſputes had ariſen before theſe, laſted longer, and devaſted almoſt all Chriſtendom by wars, perſecutions, and maſſacres, tho the ſole difference between the contending parties was about a ſingle letter. One ſide affirmed, and the nicaean council decreed, that the ſon was ὁμοούσιος, that is, conſubſtantial with the father, "habens ſi-"mul eſſentiam, id eſt, eandem eſſentiam," the arians, moſt of them at leaſt, would have acknowledged him to be ὁμοιούσιος, that is, of ſimilar ſubſtance, "habens ſimilem eſſentiam;" but the holy council adhered, and the arians were all damned for the difference of an iota. If the decrees of councils, therefore, and the ſeveral creeds that were made required ſo exact a preciſion of words and letters, and if the leaſt miſtake was of ſuch fatal conſequence, what muſt we think, what have we not reaſon to fear concerning that text on which they have all pretended to be founded, and wherein it is ſaid, that there are thirty thouſand various readings? When we meet with any record cited in hiſtory, we accept the hiſtorical proof, and content ourſelves with it, of how many copies ſoever it may be the copy. But this proof would not be admitted in judicature, as Mr. LOCKE * obſerves, nor any thing leſs than an atteſted copy of the record. The application is obvious, and if it be reaſonable to take ſuch a precaution in matters that concern private property, and wherein the ſum of ten pounds may not be at ſtake, how much more reaſonable is it to neglect no precaution that can be taken, to aſſure ourſelves that we receive nothing for the word of God, which is not ſufficiently atteſted to be ſo. It may be ſaid, it has been ſaid by a very able writer, that "the ground of this proceeding in civil courts "ſeems to be, that the original record, or an atteſted copy,

* Eſſay, l. 4. c. 16.

"is

" is capable of being produced; and that therefore to offer " any diſtant proof might look as if ſome art were intend- " ed to corrupt matters, and to diſguiſe the truth." After this, he aſks, " is it in the nature of things as poſſible and eaſy " to produce the originals, or atteſted copies of the ſcrip- " tures——as it is to do ſo in matters which come before a " civil court?" The evaſion is not even plauſible. The copy of a copy is not refuſed in proof, ſolely becauſe the original or atteſted copy may be had, for this is not always the caſe, but becauſe the proof would be too diſtant whether they can be had or no. The two caſes therefore are not vaſtly, as this writer affirms, nor at all different. If the rule may be thought reaſonable in the one, it cannot be thought, without abſurdity, unreaſonable in the other. However it happens, the want of an original, or of an atteſted copy, is a want of proof: and the learned divine will be forced, if he is puſhed on this article, to confeſs this want of proof, or to ſupply it, which he is too wiſe to attempt, by ſhewing that the ſcriptures we have are atteſted copies of the originals. I might carry this very far, if I would carry it as far as occaſion is given to carry it. But I will only ſay, that it would be much better to leave objections unanſwered, than to anſwer them no better; and that I pity a man of as good parts as Dr. CONYBEAR, who is obliged to ſuch drudgery. The authenticity of the ſcriptures has ſuffered much diminution by length of time, and by other ways; for which reaſon divines would do better, perhaps, if they truſted, more to grace and faith to ſupply this diminution, and leſs to their own ſkill, in the eſtabliſhment of the external proofs of a traditional revelation; tho I know that theſe external proofs may be deemed to be in ſome ſort " con- " ditiones ſine quibus non."

SEC-

SECTION III.

But the prerogative of reaſon extends farther than the examination of witneſſes, and other external teſtimony. There is another ground of probability to be eſtabliſhed; and if this cannot be eſtabliſhed, the credit of a revelation will not ſupport itſelf on the other alone. This ground of probability is that which was mentioned at the ſame time with the former, and is called internal evidence. Divines found it high, and build much upon it; but their proceeding is, to my apprehenſion, alike abſurd and licentious.

A divine, who has a large ſtock of theological preſumption, finds direct and evident proofs of a divine inſpiration in the very ſtyle of the ſcriptures; in the ſublimity of ſome parts, and in the ſimplicity of others: tho the ſame ſublimity, and the ſame ſimplicity are to be found in uncanonical writings, and even in thoſe of eaſtern nations that are not chriſtian. He reaſons magiſterially, as if he was thoroughly acquainted not only with the human, but with the divine nature; as if his underſtanding bore ſo near a proportion to the wiſdom of God, that he could diſcover it latent in the deepeſt myſteries, or under the veil of things ſeemingly ſo indifferent, or ſo common, that men of leſs ſagacity would not ſuſpect even human wiſdom to have been employed about them; and finally, as if his extended genius was able to comprehend a whole oeconomy of divine wiſdom from Adam down to Christ, nay even to the conſummation of things; to connect all the diſpenſations, and to ſhew the ſufficient reaſon of providence in every particular inſtance on the ſame plan. This now is madneſs, or ſomething worſe than madneſs; and yet men are ſo accuſtomed

to reaſon in this method, and on theſe principles, that not only the learned and ingenious, who have ſome pretence to be ſo mad, purſue them, but every dabler in theology, who has no ſuch pretence, and muſt paſs for a fool or a knave whenever he grows extravagant, affects to reaſon in the ſame manner when he writes, or when he preaches; and talks as impertinently in the pulpit of the deſigns of God, and of the conduct of providence, as he talks of the political deſigns and conduct of his governors in the coffee-houſe. Thus the bible becomes a canvaſs, on which it has been the buſineſs of many to dawb, from the time when it was firſt ſpread before them. If it was agreed, that ſome out-lines may have been traced by the original painter: yet would it be manifeſt, that ſeveral particular figures, and the compoſition of the whole ſyſtem is the work of bungling human pencils.

From a motley ſyſtem thus framed, the pretended internal evidences of divine revelation are drawn, and they are often drawn in ſuch a manner, that he who might yield to external proofs is ſhocked at theſe, inſtead of being confirmed by them. How ſhould it be otherwiſe, when theſe proofs are not brought even as they are found in this motley ſyſtem, and when they take the appearance, for they have often no more, of proofs, not from the plain text and tenor of the ſcriptures, but from the amplifications and conjectures of divines? Theſe amplifications and conjectures take away the force of the proof, ſuch as it is, by ſhewing too viſibly that they are amplifications and conjectures; for it is not lawful to proceed in caſes where divine, as in thoſe where human knowledge, wiſdom, and authority are alone concerned. In theſe, our endeavours to improve what we find are not only lawful, but laudable; and it is no more reaſonable that the authority of thoſe men, who have gone before us, ſhould fix the bounds of our inquiries, than

than it is that our authority ſhould fix thoſe of the men, who are to come after us. Human ſcience would have been long ago at a ſtand, if a contrary practice had prevailed univerſally, as we ſee it is, and has long been, in thoſe particular countries where the contrary practice has ſo prevailed. But what is commendable in one caſe, is blameable in the other. We have no more right to add to the word of God, than we have to alter it: and the ſame revelation which gives us divine knowledge, in what proportion ſoever it be given, and how little ſoever it may ſatisfy our curioſity, and our imaginary want, confines it likewiſe. The human maſter may tell us all he knows, and we may carry knowledge much farther on his inſtructions, and on our own ſtrength. But the divine maſter tells us no more than he judges it fit we ſhould know, and every ſtep we attempt to make beyond his expreſs revelation, and on our own ſtrength, is a ſtep we make in the dark, expoſed to err, and ſure not to know.

Tho I think that the internal evidences of a divine revelation neither are, nor can be, ſuch poſitive proofs as they are pretended to be; yet am I fully perſuaded that reaſon ought to examine the inward character of a revelation, as well as the outward teſtimony. Negative proof will ſupply the want of poſitive proof: and thus a ſure and a real criterion will be found, inſtead of one that is equivocal at beſt, and imaginary. I will not perplex the argument by conſidering how far a conformity to the general experience of mankind is to be exacted in an hiſtory that relates principally to ſupernatural events; but I may inſiſt that there is another conformity, a conformity to all we know of the Supreme Being, and of the law of our nature, ſo very eſſential to a revelation that pretends to come from God, that if any one thing repugnant to this knowledge be found in any hiſtory, or ſyſtem of doctrine, they ought to be

rejected, whatever proofs external or internal they may boaſt of a divine original. Tho we hold no very exalted rank among the intellectual creatures of God, yet has he been pleaſed to give us faculties by which we are able, in uſing them well, to demonſtrate all that he has judged neceſſary for us to know in our natural ſtate, and without ſupernatural aſſiſtance, concerning his exiſtence, his nature and attributes, his providence over his creatures, and their duties to him and to one another. We ought to acknowledge, with the utmoſt gratitude, the advantage of ſuch a rank in the order of beings: and ſhall we dare to aſſume for true any facts, or any doctrines that are evidently inconſiſtent with this knowledge, however even good men may endeavour to reconcile in opinion, by frivolous diſcourſe, things that are irreconcileable in nature, or whatever authority be employed to impoſe them? God forbid that we ſhould. Right reaſon will never adviſe us to do ſo, and if any pretended revelation required that we ſhould, it would prove itſelf to be falſe, for that very reaſon.

Natural revelation, ſo I will call it, produces knowledge, a ſeries of ſenſitive and intuitive knowledge from the firſt principles to the laſt concluſions. The ſyſtem of things that are, that is, the phaenomena of nature, are the firſt principles; and reaſon, that is, a real divine illumination, leads us from one neceſſary truth to another thro the whole courſe of theſe demonſtrations. In all theſe caſes we know; we do not believe. But in the caſe of ſupernatural revelation, when it is traditional, we can have nothing more than opinion, ſupported by human authority, and by decreaſing probability afterwards. The divine authority grows leſs and leſs apparent, whilſt the obligation of ſubmiſſion to it is reputed ſtill the ſame. But the certainty of natural revelation ſuffers no diminution. It is always original, and equally capable of forcing our aſſent in all times and places, becauſe the principles

ples by which it is manifeſted are equally objects of human ſenſe and intellect, in all times and places. The miſſionary of ſupernatural religion appeals to the teſtimony of men he never knew, and of whom the infidel he labors to convert never heard, for the truth of thoſe extraordinary events which prove the revelation he preaches: and it is ſaid that this objection was made at firſt to AUSTIN the monk by ETHELRED the ſaxon king. But the miſſionary of natural religion can appeal at all times, and every where, to preſent and immediate evidence, to the teſtimony of ſenſe and intellect, for the truth of thoſe miracles which he brings in proof: the conſtitution of the mundane ſyſtem being in a very proper ſenſe an aggregate of miracles.

UPON the whole, let us ſuppoſe the hiſtorical and traditional authority, urged in proof of a revelation, to be carried as high as the nature of things will admit, on a concurrence of all the conditions neceſſary to eſtabliſh ſuch a probability as ought to ſtand in lieu of certainty, in every other caſe, and as may induce us, in this caſe, to believe even in inſtances that are not at all conformable to general experience; yet muſt we not receive it for true till we are ſure, on the moſt careful examination, and analyſis, that it contains nothing unworthy of the majeſty of the Supreme Being, nothing inconſiſtent with the demonſtrated truths of natural religion. Prophane hiſtory may contain ſuch things as are not conformable to general experience, and be nevertheleſs credible in all other reſpects. But ſacred hiſtory, the hiſtory of a divine revelation, that contains any one thing unworthy of the Supreme Being, or repugnant to the religion of nature, and to the moſt evident dictates of reaſon, ought to be rejected with indignation, and will be ſo by every man who is afraid to blaſpheme. There are many occaſions on which we cannot diſcover the whole truth, and

on

on which, however, we are very able to diſcern what implies contradiction with ſome ſelf-evident, or demonſtrated truth. This may be one of thoſe, and on this we ſhall be ſure not to err, if we perſuade ourſelves that the ſame God who gave us reaſon to arrive at certainty in ſome caſes, and at probability in various degrees in others, never deſigned that we ſhould oppoſe probability, in any caſe, to certainty, nor believe againſt knowledge. Dr. BARROW, in a diſcourſe concerning the virtue and reaſonableneſs of faith, after begging the queſtion long, and talking in a theological cant more worthy of PAUL than of a man like him, as he was bound by his profeſſion to do, talks like a philoſopher, and a man of ſuperior ſenſe. He ſays, that "if we ſeriouſly weigh the caſe, we ſhall find that to require "faith without reaſon is to demand an impoſſibility; and that "God therefore neither doth, nor can enjoin us faith without "reaſon." Now I aſk, if we are not obliged to believe without reaſon, can we be obliged to believe againſt it? He ſays, "that no man can believe he knoweth not what nor why;" and therefore that he who "truly believeth muſt apprehend "the propoſition, and muſt diſcern its connection with ſome "principle of truth, which, as more notorious to him, he be-"fore doth admit." Now let me aſk again, can any man be ſaid to apprehend a propoſition which contains a myſtery, that is, ſomething unintelligible; or any thing more than the ſound of the words? Will not the argument againſt believing become ſtill ſtronger, if a propoſition is repugnant to any principles of truth, which we have before admitted on evident demonſtration? I am proud to have doctor BARROW on my ſide, and will therefore conclude, as he does, that the man, who pretends to believe otherwiſe, "doth only pretend to believe "out of ſome deſign, or from affection to ſome party; his "faith is not ſo much really faith as hypocriſy, craft, fondneſs, "or faction."

THIS

This being premiſed, let us own that when a revelation has paſſed ſucceſsfully thro theſe trials, when it has all the authenticity of human teſtimony, when it appears conſiſtent in all it's parts, and when it contains nothing inconſiſtent with any real knowledge which we have of the ſupreme all-perfect Being, and of natural religion, ſuch a revelation is to be received with the moſt profound reverence, the moſt intire ſubmiſſion, and the moſt unfeigned thankſgiving. Reaſon has exerciſed her whole prerogative then, and delivers us over to faith. To believe before all theſe trials, or to doubt after them, is alike unreaſonable; for nothing can be more abſurd and contemptible, than what St. Austin ſomewhere or other, for in his works I have read it, advances about believing firſt, in hopes of underſtanding afterwards; which is a propoſition much like that which Calvin *, as abſurd and as dogmatical a father as Austin, maintains, when he makes the authority of the ſcriptures to depend on the inward teſtimony of the ſpirit alone, and then mentions the proofs proper to eſtabliſh the authenticity and divinity of theſe books, as props, "admi-"nicula," that may help to ſupport the faith they could not have raiſed.

SECTION IV.

If ſuch abſurdities as theſe have induced ſome to ridicule all religions that aſſume themſelves founded on divine revelation, there are thoſe who take occaſion from the effects of them to form objections of a graver kind, and of greater conſequence. Theſe men would have it believed, that all ſuch religions are incompatible with civil ſovereignty; becauſe they introduce a

* Vid. Calvin's Inſt. l. 1. c. 8.

private

private conſcience that may be, and often is, contrary to the public conſcience of the ſtate; and not only ſet up private judgment in oppoſition to that of the legiſlature, but inforce the dictates of it by a greater authority, even by that of God himſelf. The Jews were unſociable members of the great commonwealth of mankind: and the ſame private conſcience which determined them to the exerciſe of every kind of cruelty on other nations and other religions, made them rebels to government, even to their own, upon ſome occaſions, and frequently perſecutors and aſſaſſins of one another. They thought themſelves authoriſed by their religion to commit ſuch barbarities as even they, perhaps, if they had had no religion would not have committed; and zeal for it, that is, private conſcience, inſpired a ſanguinary rage that might be called, very juſtly, religious madneſs. To ſubdue thoſe, and reduce them to a ſtate of ſervitude who do not receive the coran, is a firſt principle that made innumerable countries the ſcenes of ſlaughter and miſery. MAHOMET, who taught it, practiſed it; and his ſucceſſors have exerciſed the ſame violence, as far as they have been able to carry their arms. But this violence is not confined to thoſe whom they call infidels, for the ſects of Omar and Aly deteſt each other as much as they both do chriſtianity: and the doctors of Mecca gave as good a bull to MIRIWEIS to ſatisfy private conſciences in taking arms againſt the ſophy, as any pope ever gave to juſtify rebellion, and the depoſition of a lawful prince *.

BUT to leave judaiſm and mahometiſm, and to ſpeak of the chriſtian religion, againſt which the objection is particularly directed, and which I mean particularly to defend; it muſt

* N. B. A manuſcript in the king of France's library writ at the time, and on the ſpot, gives an account of a journey which MIRIWEIS made to Mecca for this purpoſe, before he invaded Perſia and dethroned the ſophy.

be

be confeſſed, that from the time it made any figure in the world, it appeared divided into ſects that even heathen perſecution could not unite: and that from the time it became an eſtabliſhed religion, it deluged the world with blood, at the ſuggeſtion, as well as under the pretence, of private conſcience. Whatever ſect prevailed, by eccleſiaſtical cabals, or by court intrigues, out of which the ladies * were not always excluded, that ſect dictated one public conſcience in the religion of the ſtate. Another ſect that prevailed at another time, or in another place, by much the ſame means, dictated another; and of this we need no other proof than the ſeveral revolutions from athanaſianiſm to arianiſm, and from arianiſm to athanaſianiſm. One alone could prevail at once, and as there were many, there was always a reſiſtance of private to public conſcience more or leſs open, and which broke out in mutiny or rebellion on one ſide, and in maſſacres and perſecutions on the other, very frequently. How it happened, I know not. Let divines tell that, or rather let us forbear to pry over curiouſly into the ſecret diſpoſitions of providence. But ſo it has happened, that the chriſtian religion has been attended by the ſame courſe of accidents as are common with it to every inſtitution purely human. The beſt of theſe anſwer their end in part only from the firſt, and whilſt the impreſſion of the force, that ſet them a going, laſts; and never fail to ſlacken afterwards, or to take new impreſſions from contingent events, by which they degenerate, and become inſenſibly new inſtitutions under old names. A man who denies this, or who does not confeſs like CHARRON †, that "after all, nothing ſhews more "than religion the weakneſs of humanity," is too ignorant, or too diſingenuous to deſerve an anſwer. But as government

* IF IRENE had a determining influence over the fathers of the ſecond nicaean council, there is room to think that another theological princeſs took part with EUSEBIUS of Nicomedia in the firſt.

† De la Sageſſe.

is not to be baniſhed out of ſociety, and anarchy to be introduced; becauſe government, inſtead of ſecuring the peace, and procuring the happineſs of ſtates, is often the cauſe of all their diſorders, and of their final ſubverſion: ſo neither is religion to be baniſhed out of government, becauſe, inſtead of ſtrengthening and ſupporting, it ſerves often to weaken and to diſſolve thoſe that are the moſt firmly eſtabliſhed.

What is here ſaid of religion in general, is eminently true of chriſtianity in particular. Tho this religion was born, if I may ſay ſo, in a deſert, and educated by a ſect of the moſt obſcure people in the roman empire, and tho it ſeemed calculated in many inſtances to be rather the inſtitution of an order of reformers, than of a national governing religion; yet no religion ever appeared in the world, whoſe natural tendency was ſo much directed to promote the peace and happineſs of mankind. If it has had a contrary effect, it has had it apparently, not really. Theology is in fault, not religion. Theology is a ſcience that may be compared juſtly to the box of pandora. Many good things lie uppermoſt in it. But many evil lie under them, and ſcatter plagues and deſolation thro the world. If we cannot ſhut the box, it is of uſe, however, to know that the box is open; and to be convinced the more of this truth, let us make a general analyſe of chriſtianity, and then obſerve, as generally, the riſe, progreſs, and effects of theology.

SECTION V.

In the firſt place then, chriſtianity is founded on the univerſal law of nature. I will not ſay that chriſtianity is a republication of it. But I will ſay that the goſpel teaches the great and fundamental principle of this law, univerſal benevolence; recommends

recommends the precepts of it, and commands the obſervation of them in particular inſtances occaſionally, always ſuppoſes them, always enforces them, and makes the law of right reaſon a law in every poſſible definition of the word beyond all cavil. I ſay beyond all cavil, becauſe a great deal of ſilly cavil has been employed to perplex the plaineſt thing in nature, and the beſt determined ſignification of words according to the different occaſions on which they are uſed.

I SHALL attempt perhaps, at ſome other time, to expoſe more fully the ſolemn trifling that has been employed, on this ſubject, if what will be here ſaid ſhould not be thought ſufficient, as I believe it ought to be.

WITHOUT entering therefore into metaphyſical and logical refinements, concerning fitneſſes and unfitneſſes, reſulting from the ſuppoſed eternal relations of things, which determine, according to ſome writers, the will of God himſelf; without amuſing ourſelves to diſtinguiſh between natural differences that ariſe in this manner, and moral differences that are ſaid to ariſe from will alone, let us obſerve, that not only ſelf-preſervation, but a deſire to be happy, are the immediate or improved effects of a natural inſtinct, the firſt in the whole animal kind, the laſt in the human ſpecies at leaſt. As ſoon as men's appetites and paſſions are awake, they are determined by theſe to indulge every agreeable, and to abhor every diſagreeable ſenſation; for pleaſure which is temporary, and therefore not real happineſs, paſſes for it, and is alone the object of appetite and paſſion. But as ſoon as their reaſon is formed, they diſcover the momentous difference between pleaſure and happineſs. Experience and reflection bring them acquainted with the ſyſtem in which they are placed, and with the eſſential, I do not ſay eternal differences of things according to the conſtitution

ſtitution of it, by which ſome tend to their pleaſure, ſome to their happineſs, ſome to both, and ſome to neither; or to the very contrary, to pain and miſery. By theſe conſequences they diſtinguiſh natures, and on theſe eſſential differences reaſon eſtabliſhes the principles neceſſary to promote and ſecure the human happineſs of every individual in the happineſs of ſociety. Theſe principles are called, very properly, the laws of nature; becauſe, altho it be true that the Supreme Being willed into exiſtence this ſyſtem, as he did every other, and by conſequence all the relations of things contained in it, yet it is not this will that impoſes in a ſtate of nature, and among men who have no knowledge, perhaps, of their creator; it is in truth the conſtitution of the ſyſtem alone that impoſes theſe laws on mankind originally, whatever power made the ſyſtem, or ſuppoſing it to have been never made; and when they are thus impoſed, they determine the will of our ſpecies as effectually, and oblige as ſtrongly, as the moſt powerful principle of human nature can determine and oblige human creatures.

I DO not ſay that they have their effect abſolutely, nor conſtantly. Appetite, paſſion, and the force of immediate objects are often too hard for reaſon, even among thoſe who hearken the moſt to her voice: and no wonder they ſhould be ſo, ſince they are too hard for revelation. If the law of nature, collected by human reaſon from the eſſential differences of things, cannot procure a perfect obedience from thoſe who profeſs themſelves ſubject to it, without the aſſiſtance of civil laws, and political inſtitutions, nor even with this aſſiſtance; ſo may we ſee even in every chriſtian country, that the will of God, declared in his works, and in his word, cannot determine the rebellious will of man to conform to it in any near degree, even where it is inforced by the terrors of preſent, as well as future puniſhments, that are held out to the tranſgreſſors of it.

it. If we conſider effects, the law of nature is as much a law as the law of the goſpel, and creates as really an obligation in choice to prefer good to evil. If we conſider original inſtitution and authority, it will not indeed correſpond in the mind of a ſtratonic philoſopher with his notion of an human law impoſed by will, but he will be under no neceſſity of applying that notion to it. He may think, and call it a law impoſed on him by the operations of a ſuperior, tho unintelligent power, the courſe of which he cannot alter, and muſt therefore conform himſelf to it in order to be happy; and ſomething of this kind even GROTIUS * was forced to allow, a little unwillingly, when he ſaid —— "et haec quidem —— "locum aliquem haberent etiamſi daremus —— non eſſe "Deum." The morality of actions does not, I think, conſiſt in this, that they are preſcribed by will, even the will of God; but in this, that they are the means, however impoſed the practice of them may be, of acquiring happineſs agreeable to our nature. Morality regards manners, and the conduct of human life, and therefore I ſee as little reaſon to deny that atheiſts may have knowledge of the morality of actions, as I do to deny that the practice of this morality is enjoined by a law in the ſenſe of obliging and binding; for if it ſhould be ſaid, that it cannot paſs for a law in this ſenſe, becauſe every man's own reaſon impoſes it on him, and he cannot be at once the obliger and the obliged, the binder and the bound, I ſhould think the ſophiſm ſcarce worthy of an anſwer; or ſhould content myſelf to inform the ſophiſter, that there may be obligation without a law by will, and a law by will without obligation, and then leave him to ponder on the matter.

BUT now, tho the law of nature be a law in a ſtrict and proper ſenſe, and as really promulgated by God in his works as

* De jure belli et pacis. proleg. 2.

it

it would have been in his word if he had ſpoke to his creatures, how much wrangling ſoever may be made by men who frame and change definitions juſt as their different purpoſes require; yet is this law more completely, and more effectually ſuch to a theiſt than to an atheiſt, and Mr. BAYLE's famous paradox can never be received for truth by common ſenſe, nor by good policy. The ſame uſe of ſenſe and reaſon ſhews to both the conſtitution of nature, the eſſential differences of things, and the obligations that have the force of laws derived from thence. But the former riſes from a knowledge of the phaenomena to a knowledge of the God of nature, and in the law he diſcovers the lawgiver. The atheiſt ſees it is his intereſt, the theiſt ſees it is his duty, to obſerve this law, and he adores the divine wiſdom and goodneſs that have blended together ſo marvellouſly, and ſo graciouſly, his greateſt intereſt and his greateſt duty. Every kind of knowledge, whereof our nature is capable, combines to ſhew the theiſt, that God ſpeaks to man in his works, and ſignifies his will by them. He can neither be in doubt whether it is God who ſpeaks, nor be at a loſs to underſtand the divine language. An atheiſt who has much imagination, much elevation of mind, and a great warmth of inward ſentiment, may, perhaps, contemplate the differences of things in abſtract conſideration, and contraſt the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice till he falls in love, if I may uſe the expreſſion after TULLY, with the former, and grows to abhor every appearance of the latter. He may create, in this manner, in himſelf, as it were, an artificial moral ſenſe; for to aſſume any ſuch natural inſtinct is as abſurd as to aſſume innate ideas, or any other of the platonic whimſies. But how much more lively muſt this ſenſe be in the theiſt, who knows not only that virtue is the perfection of his nature, but that he conforms himſelf by the practice of it to the deſigns of infinite wiſdom, and co-operates in ſome ſort with the Almighty?

As

As a knowledge of the eſſential differences of things may lead men who know not God, to a knowledge of the morality of actions, ſo do theſe eſſential differences ſerve as ſo many clues by which the theiſt may guide himſelf thro all the intricacies of error and of diſputation, to a knowledge of the will of God. Since infinite wiſdom, that muſt always proportion means to ends, has made happineſs the end or inſtinctive object of all his human creatures; and has ſo conſtituted them, and the ſyſtem in which he has placed them, that they can neither attain to this happineſs, nor be ſecure in the poſſeſſion of it by any other means than the practice of morality, or the ſocial virtues; it is demonſtrated, that God wills we ſhould purſue theſe means to arrive at this end. We know more certainly the will of God in this way, than we can know it in any other. We may take the word of man for the word of God, and in fact this has been, and is ſtill the caſe of many. But we can never miſtake the works of God for the works of men, and may be therefore aſſured that a revelation, evidently manifeſted in them, is a divine revelation. But tho natural religion is an object of knowledge, and all other religions, even that of the goſpel, can reſt on nothing more than probability, yet may that probability be ſuch as will and ought to force our aſſent. He therefore who thinks that the chriſtian religion is founded on ſuch a probability, may affirm that the goſpel, tho he does not think it, in propriety of ſpeech, a republication, is a confirmation of the law of nature, and renders this a law beyond all cavil about the term.

Sanctions of this law are implied in the theiſtical ſyſtem; becauſe it aſſumes, and to be ſure very juſtly, that the general happineſs, or miſery, of mankind depends on the obſervation of this law, and that the degrees of one and the other bear always

ways a proportion to the exerciſe, and to the neglect of public, and private virtue, in every community. But theſe motives are ſuch as particular men will be apt to think do not immediately, nor directly concern them, becauſe they are apt to conſider themſelves as individuals, rather than as members of ſociety, and to catch at pleaſure without any regard to happineſs. To give an additional ſtrength, therefore, to theſe motives, that are determining in their own nature, but not ſo according to the imperfection of ours; deciſive to our reaſon, but not ſo to our appetites and paſſions, the antient theiſts and polytheiſts, philoſophers or legiſlators, invented another; that, I mean, of future rewards and puniſhments repreſented under various forms, but always directed to the ſame purpoſe. This motive every man who believes it may, and muſt, apply to himſelf, and hope the reward, and fear the puniſhment for his ſecret as well as public actions, nay for his thoughts as well as his actions. What effect this motive had in remote antiquity we cannot ſay, but it had loſt it's force long before the inſtitution of chriſtianity. The fear of hell particularly was ridiculed by ſome of the greateſt moraliſts; and to ſhew how little it was kept up in the minds of the vulgar, we may obſerve that TULLY * treated it in ſome of his public pleadings as he would have avoided ſcrupulouſly to do, whatever he thought of it himſelf, if this fear had been at that time prevalent even among the vulgar.

* ——— quid tandem illi mali mors attulit? niſi forte ineptiis et fabulis ducimur, ut exiſtimemus apud inferos impiorum ſupplicia perferre. ——— actum eſſe praecipitem in ſceleratorum ſedem atque regionem. Quae ſi falſa ſunt, id quod omnes intelligunt; quid ei tandem aliud mors eripuit, praeter ſenſum doloris? pro CLUENTIO. ——— Ut aliqua in vitâ formido improbis eſſet poſita, apud inferos ejuſmodi quaedam illi antiqui ſupplicia impiis conſtituta eſſe voluerunt: quod videlicet intelligebant, his remotis, non eſſe mortem ipſam pertimeſcendam. Orat. 4, in CATILIN.

THO

THO future rewards and punishments are not original nor direct sanctions of the law of nature, because not coeval with it, yet they became such when the christian revelation was made. They are original sanctions of christianity, and christianity which includes, was designed to enforce, the law of nature. We may, therefore, be allowed to wonder, and to seek the reason, why the law of nature, thus enforced, has served so little to correct the manners of men, and to promote the peace and happiness of the world? Why christianity has served, on the contrary, to determine men to violate the very law it confirms, and has opened a new source of mischief wherever it has prevailed? I said above, that theology is in fault, not religion. We shall see this verified in every part of the analyse we make of christianity. A few reflections will shew it to be so in this part, where we consider the gospel as a system of natural religion.

SECTION VI.

THE law of nature then, or natural religion, as it is the most important, is the plainest of all laws; and if the heavens do not declare the will, as well as the glory of God, according to an observation my lord BACON * makes in a chapter that contains some of the idols of the den, and of the theater particularly, sure I am, that the earth, and the inhabitants of it, declare both. The will of God has been revealed in his works to all those who have applied themselves to the contemplation of them, even to those who did not discover him in them, from the time that men have used their reason; and where reason improved, and knowledge increased, morality was carried as high in spe-

* De Aug. Scien. lib. 9. chap. 1.

culation, and in practice too, by ſome of the heathen worthies, as by any of the chriſtian ſaints; even as high as the very precept which the chancellor * quotes, and which he declares, a little raſhly, to be more than human, and above the light of nature, ſince it was taught by ſome who had no other light. Notwithſtanding this, divines, who cannot bear, that the will, any more than the exiſtence, of God ſhould be deduced from his works, the cleareſt and the moſt authentic of all revelations, affirm againſt fact and reaſon both, that men may have indeed ſome true notions of virtue and vice, and of good and evil, by the light of nature, but that the moral law is too ſublime for reaſon to attain to every part of it; and on this affirmation, a great deal of theological policy has been eſtabliſhed. Thus they give too another inſtance of their inconſiſtency, for nothing is more common than to find in their writings, nay in the courſe of the ſame argument, the religion of nature extolled as a perfect, and vilified as a moſt imperfect ſyſtem. Had theſe reverend perſons been content to teach the duties of natural religion with evangelical ſimplicity, as CHRIST himſelf did in his ſermon on the mount and elſewhere, they might have taught additional duties, and theological virtues apart; and they might have enforced the whole, if they had pleaſed, by the heaven they promiſed, and by the hell they threatened.

THUS they might have preſerved natural religion in the genuine purity of it. Inſtead of perplexing and corrupting it, they might have enabled every one to be his own caſuiſt, and have made good men as well as Chriſtians. But this method, which would have enlarged the kingdom of God, would not have enlarged, nor fortified, the theological empire. To do

* Diligite inimicos; benefacite his qui oderunt vos——quae certe verba plauſum illum merentur, nec vox hominem ſonat; ſi quidem vox eſt, quae lumen naturae ſuperat. ib.

this

this the more effectually, it was neceſſary to maintain the inſufficiency of human reaſon, tho God thought it ſo ſufficient, that he left the whole race of mankind, a few patriarchs and the choſen ſeed excepted, ſeveral thouſand years under no other conduct. It was neceſſary to boaſt the neceſſity of a revelation that might ſupply the defects of reaſon, tho this revelation remains, and has remained, from the time it was made, unknown to the far greateſt part of mankind. It was neceſſary to make even the moral law a myſtery, and ſuch a myſtery as could not be, on many occaſions, unveiled without a profound knowledge of theology; which is a ſcience that their order has imagined, and has reſerved to itſelf. In this reſpect, the chriſtian prieſthood has been wiſer than the heathen. The heathen prieſts were wholly employed in teaching ſilly ceremonies, and celebrating the pompous rites of ſuperſtitious worſhip. They left the care of teaching the principles, and inculcating the obligations of morality to philoſophers; at leaſt in the times with which we are beſt acquainted, this was the ſtate of religion among the pagans. But from the moſt early days of chriſtianity, it has not been thus in the chriſtian church. The perſons, whom we repute commiſſioned to inſtruct others in revealed religion, have aſſumed the ſole right of deciding in all caſes concerning natural religion, that is, in almoſt all the moſt important affairs of public and private life.

By theſe means, and by theſe men, the moral law has been ſo intermixed with theology, and both of them have been ſo extended, and ſo perplexed, that the two plaineſt things in the world, and which would not have been fitted to the purpoſe of them, nor by conſequence worthy of their author, if they had not been plain, the law of nature and the law of grace, have been rendered voluminous, intricate, and contentious to ſuch a degree, that the life of man is ſcarce long enough to attain a

knowledge of them. Divines, who are ſuppoſed to have this knowledge, are therefore conſulted like oracles, and till their deciſions, like thoſe of the others, and for ſome of the ſame reaſons, began to loſe their credit, their authority in the direction of private conſcience was abſolute, and extended from the prince to the peaſant, who were alike under their influence. When they had decoyed mankind out of the plain into a wood, they who had planted the wood were neceſſary guides in it. Much ill uſe has been made of this authority, and much color given by it to the objection againſt religion, which we conſider here. So much, that I apprehend there is no way to do right to chriſtianity, but that of imputing, as we do, conſequences that cannot be denied, to the corruption of religion by theology. This corruption has gone ſo far, that altho it be of the laſt abſurdity to affirm, that any law can alter, much leſs contradict, that of nature, yet have men preſumed to diſpenſe with the obſervations of this law, to diſtinguiſh it away, to decide in direct oppoſition to it, and ſhameleſſly to advance, that the biſhop of your church, for inſtance, has a power to alter the very nature of things. "Jure poteſt contra jus de-"cernere." Nay, BELLARMIN preſumed to ſay, that if a pope ſhould injoin vices and forbid virtues, the chriſtian church would be obliged to believe vices good and virtues evil, or would ſin againſt conſcience. "Niſi vellet contra conſcienti-"am peccare." BELLARM. de Pont.

MORAL theology, which contains a ſuper-ethical doctrine, as ſome grave divines have ridiculouſly called it, rendered the ſyſtem of ethics in the writings of the antient fathers, and doctors of the chriſtian church, more confuſed, leſs conſiſtent, and often leſs moral than we find it eſtabliſhed in thoſe of the heathen, altho no ſyſtem can be more ſimple and plain than this of natural religion as it ſtands in the goſpel. I do not pretend

pretend to criticiſe the offices of St. AMBROSE, tho he was a ſaint not very unlike our BECKET; but I will ſuppoſe, that no man preſumes to compare them, in any reſpect to thoſe of TULLY, and I will advance that TULLY would have bluſhed to own ſome of the moral doctrines of St. AUSTIN, tho St. AUSTIN was after St. PAUL, the great author of theological ſyſtems. This abuſe of reaſon, and of revelation both, was never puſhed ſo extravagantly, however, as it was by the ſchool divines. Theſe men, who ſate ruminating in their cells on the very little they knew by experience and obſervation, and whoſe minds, therefore, were void of the true materials of knowledge, worked up, in place of them, all the "entia ra-" tionis," chimeras of imagination that have no ſubſiſtence out of it, and paſs under the name of metaphyſics; all the uſeleſs definitions, frivolous diſtinctions, vain ſubtilties, and captious argumentations of logic. By them, caſuiſtry came into vogue, which has been called in french "l'art de chicaner avec Dieu:" as logic has been called "l'art de chicaner avec les hommes;" and we may call the whole tribe, as BUCHANAN called the ſcotch and iriſh ſcholaſtics particularly,

"Gens ratione furens, et mentem paſta chimaeris."

Some divines have made men enthuſiaſts, by ſtraining the obligations of natural and revealed religion both ſo high, that they become almoſt inconceivable, and quite impracticable. Others again, ſcholaſtic divines and caſuiſts eſpecially, have ſo relaxed all theſe, and taught men ſo many ways of compounding, as it were, with God, that they are left at liberty, on many occaſions, to indulge the exceſs of their paſſions. According to the firſt, a good Chriſtian is an ideal man that never exiſted out of idea, as much as the ſage of the ſtoics. According to the laſt, the worſt of men may be good Chriſtians on earth, and ſaints in heaven. In ſhort, they have di-

vided

vided the two laws that are intimately united in the goſpel, have ſet them in oppoſition, and have very often made the violations of one paſs for lawful means of promoting the other. The natural effect of religion is to help reaſon to ſubdue our paſſions, and of theology to help the paſſions to ſubdue reaſon and religion both, not only by indulgence to them, but by irritating the worſt and moſt furious of them. Hiſtory is full of ſuch examples; and irreligious perſons make uſe of them, unjuſtly, againſt chriſtianity.

SECTION VII.

THERE are two other parts beſides this of natural religion, into which chriſtianity may be analyſed, and which have been corrupted alike by theology. Duties ſuperadded to thoſe of the former, and articles of belief that reaſon neither could diſcover, nor can comprehend. As impracticable as ſome, and as incredible as others may ſeem, the duties required to be practiſed, and the propoſitions required to be believed are conciſely and plainly enough expreſſed in the goſpel, in the original goſpel properly ſo called, which CHRIST taught, and which his four evangeliſts recorded. But they have been rendered, ſince they were firſt publiſhed, and they began to be ſo as ſoon as they were publiſhed, extremely voluminous and intricate. The duties, external duties at leaſt, have been multiplied by eccleſiaſtical policy, that profited of the natural ſuperſtition of mankind. The articles of belief have been multiplied, and complicated by cabaliſtical notions taken from the Jews, and by metaphyſical refinements taken from heathen theology. Children ſuffer often for the ſins of their fathers. But in this caſe, the rule is inverted. The goſpel gave birth to chriſtian theology, and the goſpel ſuffers for the ſins of her licentious offspring; of that eccleſi-

eccleſiaſtical order, I mean, who affecting to be called the religious, have proved themſelves to be the moſt irreligious ſociety that was ever formed, and the moſt hurtful too, as he who compares, thro the whole ſeries of their own hiſtory, the little good, with the infinite miſchief they have done, muſt confeſs.

It is common, and yet aſtoniſhing, to obſerve with how much ſolemnity and confidence almoſt all thoſe, who teach and defend chriſtianity, preſume to affirm any thing, tho never ſo evidently falſe, that they imagine may ſerve to recommend it, and how by theſe means they do hurt, even where they intend to do good. They do hurt, moſt certainly, to the cauſe of religion; and the end is, in this caſe, ſo far from ſanctifying the means, that the means diſgrace the end. One artifice that they employ continually, is to confound, as much as they can, the want of power in the heathen world to reform the manners of men, by promoting effectually the practice of natural religion, and the want of a ſufficient knowledge of this religion. That the heathen ſages wanted this power is true, and that the apoſtles, ſaints, and doctors of chriſtianity have not had it, even with the help of a particular revelation, is true likewiſe; but it is as falſe to ſay that the former had not a ſufficient knowledge of natural religion, as it would be to ſay that Chriſtians have it not. The great book of nature lies open before us, and our natural reaſon enables us to read in it. Whatever it may contain, that cannot be thus read, cannot be called natural religion with any preciſion of ideas, or propriety of words; nor will the example, that has been brought, of men who aſſent readily to truths conſonant to their reaſon, which they receive from others, and would have found it hard to diſcover themſelves, be made applicable to the preſent caſe, ſo as to deſtroy the diſtinction. Mr. Locke ſhould have ſeen this

this ſooner than any man, and one would think a reflection ſo obvious ſhould eſcape no man. He did not, or he would not, make it. He ſeems to me, in the latter part of his treatiſe concerning the reaſonableneſs of chriſtianity, not only to confound the want of ſufficient means to propagate, and the want of ſufficient means to know the religion of nature, but to play ſo looſely in his expreſſions between this religion and the chriſtian, that it is hard to diſtinguiſh ſometimes what he intends; whether he intends means of propagating or means of knowing; to what ſenſe he confines natural, and to what revealed religion. Thus much, however, is very clear: he aſſerts the inſufficiency of "human reaſon, unaſſiſted by revelation, "in it's great and proper buſineſs of morality." Human reaſon, he ſays, "never made out an entire body of the law of "nature from unqueſtionable principles, or by clear deduc-"tions. Scattered ſayings, —— incoherent apophthegms of "philoſophers and wiſe men —— could never make a mora-"lity —— could never riſe to the force of a law." Theſe aſſertions now are in part, and in part only, true. But when he comes to contraſt this ſuppoſed imperfect knowledge of the religion of nature, which the heathen had, with that ſuppoſed perfect knowledge which is communicated by the goſpel, what he advances ſtands in direct contradiction to truth. It is not true, that CHRIST revealed an entire body of ethics, proved to be the law of nature from principles of reaſon, and reaching all the duties of life. If mankind wanted ſuch a code, to which recourſe might be had on every occaſion, as to an unerring rule in every part of the moral duties, ſuch a code is ſtill wanting; for the goſpel is not ſuch a code. Moral obligations are occaſionally recommended and commanded in it, but no where proved from principles of reaſon, and by clear deductions, unleſs alluſions, parables, and compariſons, and promiſes, and threats, are to paſs for ſuch. Were all the precepts of this kind,

kind, that are ſcattered about in the whole new teſtament, collected, like the ſhort ſentences of antient ſages in the memorials we have of them, and put together in the very words of the ſacred writers, they would compoſe a very ſhort, as well as unconnected ſyſtem of ethics. A ſyſtem thus collected from the writings of antient heathen moraliſts, of TULLY, of SENECA, of EPICTETUS, and others, would be more full, more entire, more coherent, and more clearly deduced from unqueſtionable principles of knowledge. Nor muſt we think that this takes off from the dignity, the authority, or the utility, even in moral doctrines, of revealed religion. The law of nature was ſufficiently known, and the teachers of it, who made no pretence to any divine miſſion, had preſſed it on the minds and conſciences of mankind, the ſole way they could preſs it, by arguments drawn from the reaſon of things. Revelation was not given to do what reaſon could do alone. It was not given to convince men of the reaſonableneſs of morality, but to enforce the practice of it by a ſuperior authority.

IF there was any thing like a complete ſyſtem of morality in the goſpel, we ſhould find it in the fifth, ſixth, and ſeventh chapters of St. MATTHEW, ſince they contain a ſermon preached by CHRIST himſelf, not on any one particular doctrine, but on the whole duty of man. What now do we find in them? Many excellent precepts of morality, no doubt, intermingled with, and enforced by ſeveral conſiderations drawn from his own revelations, and yet ſuch as the law of nature enjoins, or implies, and as have been practiſed by philoſophers, and other good men among the heathen. Some of theſe, and ſome others that we find interſperſed in the goſpels, are ſuch as may be reckoned of the kind of thoſe which St. AUSTIN calls "ſubli-"miora praecepta," not ſo much poſitive duties, as inſtances of greater purity and chriſtian perfection, and rather recom-

mended than commanded. Thus, for inſtance, wherever marriage has been inſtituted, adultery has been forbid. It was ſo by the moſaic law, it is ſo by the law of nature; for tho marriage be not directly inſtituted by this law, yet every wrong, every invaſion of another man's property, and every injuſtice is forbid by it. Now the goſpel carries this duty much farther, and declares, that "whoſoever looketh on a woman to luſt after "her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." The law that forbids the commiſſion of a crime, does certainly imply that we ſhould not deſire to commit it; for to want the deſire, or to be able to extinguiſh it, is the beſt ſecurity of our obedience; tho he who is unable to extinguiſh it, and yet abſtains from the ſin, has in the eye of reaſon a greater degree of merit. Reaſon commanded what a man may by the force of reaſon perform. Revelation commands what it is impoſſible to obey, without an aſſiſtance unknown to reaſon. Thus again, murder is forbid by the law of nature, but even anger is forbid by this; and univerſal benevolence, that great principle of the firſt, is ſtrained by the laſt to a love of our enemies and perſecutors: a precept ſo ſublime, that I doubt whether it was ever exactly obſerved any more under the law of grace, than under the law of nature, tho ſome appearances of it may be found, perhaps, under both, and at leaſt as many under one as under the other. Theſe ſublime precepts, which are peculiarly chriſtian, and ſeem deſigned to characteriſe chriſtianity, have not been obſerved by the profeſſors of it, either antient or modern. The quaker who ſays yea yea, and nay nay, and doth not ſwear at all, does not willingly part with his coat as well as his cloak, nor give away one becauſe the other has been taken from him; neither does the good man neglect to lay up ſome treaſures on earth, where moth and ruſt corrupt, and where thieves break thro and ſteal. It has occurred to me often, that the ſame reaſon may be given for theſe ſublime precepts, which

which TULLY gives ſomewhere for the ſeverer doctrines of the ſtoics. Men will always ſtop ſhort of that pitch of virtue which is propoſed to them, and it is therefore right to carry the notions of it as high as poſſible. Whether this reaſon will be admitted or no, I cannot tell. It ſeems to me the beſt that can be given, "et valeat quantum valere poteſt." In all caſes theſe ſublime precepts are ſo little inconſiſtent with the law of nature, that they are this very law carried beyond the original terms of it.

THERE are beſides theſe general duties, and others of the ſame kind commanded, or recommended by the goſpel, ſome that ſeem directed to the Jews only, and ſome that ſeem directed more immediately to the diſciples of CHRIST. Of the firſt ſort is that injunction which reſtrains divorces to the caſe of adultery; whereas by the law of MOSES, as well as by thoſe of other legiſlators, a man who did not like his wife, nor care to cohabit with her, might give her a letter of divorce, and turn her out of his doors; for which expreſs leave is given in Deuteronomy *. Of the ſame ſort are thoſe directions which tend to render the worſhip of God more intellectual, and the practice of good works leſs oſtentatious. The heathen faſted and prayed, and exerciſed charity as well as the Jews. But the divine worſhip of both conſiſted in a multitude of external duties, and in pompous rites and ceremonies; and the Jews are taxed particularly with hypocriſy, and with an affectation of doing acts of charity in public, in the ſtreets, and the ſynagogues, in order to gratify their vanity, and to be applauded by the public. Of the ſecond ſort are certain duties enjoined in this ſermon, and in other parts of the goſpel, which ſeem fit enough for a religious ſect, or order of men like the eſſenians, but are by no means practicable in the general ſociety of mankind. To reſiſt no injury, to take no care for to morrow, to neglect provid-

* Chap. xxiv.

ing

ing for the common neceſſaries of life, and to ſell all to follow CHRIST, might be properly exacted from thoſe who were his companions, and his diſciples in a ſtricter ſenſe, like the ſcholars of PYTHAGORAS, admitted within the curtain; but reaſon and experience both ſhew that, conſidered as general duties, they are impracticable, inconſiſtent with natural inſtinct, as well as law, and quite deſtructive of ſociety. They have not been therefore conſidered as ſuch. They have been laid aſide, and nothing more than a pretended obſervation of them has been kept up by ſome of the monaſtic orders.

IF this now be, as it is moſt certainly, a true, tho general and ſhort repreſentation of the moral duties contained in the goſpel, and added to thoſe of natural religion, both which conſiſt in piety towards God, and benevolence towards man, will any diſciple of the philoſopher of Malmeſbury preſume to maintain, that the objection raiſed againſt religion has the leaſt force on account of them, or that they render it inconſiſtent with civil ſovereignty? He who ſhould maintain it, would fall below notice, and not deſerve an anſwer. But if the objection be levelled againſt the numberleſs duties ſuperadded to thoſe of the goſpel, inſtead of being levelled againſt the few that have been ſuperadded by the goſpel to thoſe of natural religion, it will be unanſwerable. Thoſe of the former ſort have been ſo increaſed, eſpecially in matters of rites, of ceremonies, and of external devotion, by the authority of the church, and in the courſe of ages, that they overload and ſtifle, as it were, true religion; nay that they ſubſtitute in lieu of it a carnal religion, ſuch as that of the Jews, and thoſe of paganiſm were. That the religion inſtituted by MOSES was ſuch in outward appearance, "in frontiſpicio quidem," ſays SPENCER, our divines admit. But they aſſert that inwardly, "in penetrali," it was divine and myſtic. The heathen ſaid the ſame of theirs; and

and in truth, if theirs were not very divine, they were very myſtical. Chriſtianity has completed the round, and has been brought back, in many countries at leaſt, from the ſimplicity of the goſpel to the pageantry and ſuperſtition of heathen and jewiſh obſervances.

THE ſacraments of baptiſm and the Lord's ſupper are certainly divine ceremonies, ſince they were inſtituted by CHRIST himſelf; and they may be ſaid to be myſtical too, becauſe they are intended to be viſible ſigns of ſomething inviſible. Baptiſm, or waſhing, is neceſſary to cleanlineſs and health, in warm countries eſpecially. But it was ſoon adopted by thoſe who inſtituted religions, and applied it to inward, as well as outward purification. It was ſo among the heathen, it was ſo among the Jews, it is ſo at this day among the idolaters in the Indoſtan, and among the Mahometans. The heathen had their public and private purifications, and we know, by other proofs beſides the acknowledgment of St. AUSTIN, that baptiſm was one of them. We know too, that the pagan ceremonies of purification had a ſpiritual meaning, and were intended to keep up a ſenſe of religion in the minds of men. "Caſtè jubet lex "adire ad deos," ſays TULLY *, "animo videlicet —— nec "tollit caſtimoniam corporis." The Jews employed ſeveral kinds of baptiſm. They baptiſed even their houſhold goods. Every kind had a myſtical ſignification, and the proſelytes to the law of MOSES, who were baptiſed as well as circumciſed, were underſtood to be regenerated as well as purified. The proſelyte became a new man by this ceremony, retained nothing of his former ſtate, and even his parents ceaſed to be reputed ſuch. The precurſor of CHRIST inſtituted a baptiſm of repentance; and even CHRIST himſelf, who had not certainly any need of repentance, inſiſted to be baptiſed in the Jordan, as he

* Lib. 2. de legib.

was

was after ſome modeſt reſiſtance on the part of JOHN. He was not only baptiſed before he began his miſſion: but he inſtituted this ceremony at the cloſe of it, when he ordered his diſciples to "baptiſe all nations in the name of the father, the ſon, and the "holy ghoſt."

THE communion or the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper is another, and the only other, religious ceremony inſtituted by the ſame divine authority. We hear ſomething of ſymbols of bread, and ſymbols of the cup, which cup was of water, that were uſed in the myſteries of MITHRAS, and in others. There is, I think, no room to ſuſpect that the chriſtian communion bore any alluſion to thoſe rites in it's inſtitution, whatever it did afterwards. But the Jews had their paſſover, and in imitation of that feaſt, as well as on occaſion of it, CHRIST inſtituted his ſupper. One was deſigned to preſerve the memory of the exode, before which a deſtroying angel paſſed over the houſes of the Iſraelites, and put the firſt born of the Egyptians to death. The other was deſigned to preſerve the memory of the death of CHRIST, which was then near, which he aſſured his diſciples had been foretold by the prophets, and would be effectual to the redemption of mankind, and to the remiſſion of ſin. No inſtitutions can be imagined more ſimple, nor more void of all thoſe pompous rites and theatrical repreſentations that abounded in the religious worſhip of the heathen and the Jews, than theſe two were in their origin. They were not only innocent, but profitable ceremonies, becauſe they were extremely proper to keep up the ſpirit of true natural religion, by keeping up that of chriſtianity, and to promote the obſervation of moral duties, by maintaining a reſpect for the revelation that confirmed them. But they were ſoon perverted by the fathers of the church, who truſted ſo little to the providence of God for the propagation of this religion, that

that they employed the loweſt tricks of human policy for the purpoſe. They added another ſtage of external obſervances, if I may ſay ſo, in the progreſs of converts to chriſtianity, and modelled the ceremonies of it on the plan of thoſe heathen myſteries, againſt which they declaimed ſo bitterly; for the good men were apt to be bitter, as well as inconſiſtent. Baptiſm was the ceremony of purgation that preceded initiation. Neither children nor others were admitted to it, till by exorciſms, and the blowing of the prieſts upon them, the impure ſpirits were driven from them. Blowing was the firſt, waſhing the ſecond part of this purgation. They who had gone thro both were fitted to receive the influences of grace. They were the catechumens, the initiated, who partook of the firſt and leaſt myſteries: and the complete or perfect Chriſtians were thoſe, who not only partook of the greateſt, the communion, but were let into the whole ſecret of it. This third ſtage was that of conſummation, according to chriſtian as well as heathen theology: and it would ſcarce be poſſible to believe, that the greateſt ſaints and doctors of the church had talked ſo much blaſphemous nonſenſe, and employed ſo much artifice about it, if their writings were not extant, and if we did not ſee in them, that deification in another life was promiſed to thoſe who received the chriſtian ſacraments with faith; as it had been promiſed to thoſe who went piouſly thro all the myſterious ceremonies of heatheniſm. It would be ſcarce poſſible to believe that even ATHANASIUS, as well known as he is by his creed and by other circumſtances, could have had the front to aſſert, that men are united to the godhead by a participation of the ſpirit, "participatione ſpiri-" tûs conjungimur deitati;" which participation is the effect of theſe ſacraments, of that particularly, which was called "mag-" num et pavendum myſterium," and the ſacrament "emi-" nentiae gratia," as it was then, and as it is at this hour. It would be tedious to deſcend into a greater detail here. If

you

you have a mind at any time to do ſo, you may conſult, among other writings, the ſixteenth exercitation of CASAUBON againſt BARONIUS, where you will find enough to ſatisfy your curioſity, and more than enough to raiſe your ſurpriſe. All I ſhall ſay more concerning theſe two religious ceremonies, inſtituted by CHRIST, is this; baptiſm has been kept at no very great diſtance from the ſimplicity of it's original, and the little alteration that has been made, leaving it as much a ſign as it was before, and, no doubt, as effectual as it was before to every other purpoſe, renders the ceremony more decent by ſprinkling only with water, according to the practice of the weſtern churches, than it would be by a total immerſion, according to that of the primitive church, and of the oriental churches, if I miſtake not, even at this time. But the other inſtitution has been ſo diſguiſed by ornament, and ſo much directed, in your church at leaſt, to a different purpoſe from commemoration, that, if the diſciples were to aſſemble at eaſter in the chapel of his holineſs, PETER would know his ſucceſſor as little as CHRIST would acknowledge his vicar, and the reſt would be unable to gueſs what the ceremony repreſented, or intended.

IT would be ſtill more tedious to deſcend into an enumeration of all the impoſitions, which the church has laid on the chriſtian world. New powers, new rights, new duties, new ſins, new ceremonies, new obſervances to be practiſed from the birth to the death of every man, all tending to the profit of the clergy, none founded on the plain authority, and many eſtabliſhed in direct contradiction to the ſpirit, and to the letter of the goſpel. Judaiſm and paganiſm gave occaſion to them. They were derived from thence. They are no parts of the chriſtian ſyſtem: CHRIST had no ſhare in their inſtitution. The manner indeed in which the goſpel was publiſhed, and much more the manner in which it was propagated, might lead deſigning,

en-

enthuſiaſtical, and ſuperſtitious men, to graft all theſe foreign branches on the ſtock of genuine chriſtianity. CHRIST himſelf was, in outward appearance, a Jew. He ordered his diſciples, and the crowds that followed him, to obſerve and do whatever the ſcribes and phariſees, who ſat in the chair of MOSES, ſhould direct *. He only warned them againſt the examples that theſe men gave, who did not practiſe what they taught, "dicunt enim et non faciunt." He was a better Jew than they, and he exhorted others to be the ſame. It is true that he commiſſioned his apoſtles to teach and baptiſe all nations †, when he gave them his laſt inſtructions. But he meaned no more, perhaps, by all nations, than the Jews diſperſed into all nations, ſince he had before that time forbid them to go into the ways of the Gentiles, and into the cities of the Samaritans §. He ſent them rather to the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael, and declared this in a very remarkable manner to be the object of his own miſſion, by the language he held to the canaanite woman. She endeavoured in vain to move his compaſſion. He told her it was not fit to take the bread of the children and give it to the dogs ‖: nor did he relent and cure her daughter, till he was overcome by her importunity and her faith.

THESE declarations of JESUS before his crucifixion, and the charge he gave to his diſciples after his reſurrection, might embarraſs them a little, and might cauſe ſome difference of opinion among them at their firſt ſetting out. So it happened: and tho a predilection for the Jews, and a ſtrong attachment to the obſervances of the law, might have been expected from St. PAUL, a zealous phariſee, who had been bred at the feet of GAMALIEL, rather than from St. PETER, a poor ignorant fiſherman; yet St. PAUL diſtinguiſhed himſelf as the apoſtle of the Gentiles, and alledged, that the goſpel of the uncircumciſion

* MATT. chap. xxiii. † Ibid. xxviii. § Ibid. x. ‖ Ibid. xv.

was committed unto him, as the goſpel of the circumciſion was unto PETER *. It is probable, that the firſt had made a reflection early, and had ſeen it confirmed by experience, as ſoon as he entered on his apoſtolical miſſion, that eſcaped the ſecond. The reflection I mean is this, that the contempt and averſion in which both the nation and the religion of the Jews were held by the reſt of mankind, would make it much more eaſy to convert the Gentiles at once to chriſtianity, than to make them Jews firſt, in order to make them Chriſtians afterwards. The council of the apoſtles and the elders at Jeruſalem, to which PAUL and BARNABAS were deputed from Antioch, where the diſpute about circumciſing the gentile converts had been carried even into mutiny, was of the ſame mind. Nay St. PETER † himſelf ſpoke on that ſide of the queſtion, how much ſoever he trimmed when St. PAUL withſtood him to his face §, and reproved him for his diſſimulation, and the bad example he gave.

IT is evident, that indulgence to the Jews and to the Gentiles, in order to gain both, was a fundamental principle of apoſtolical conduct from the firſt preaching of the goſpel. PETER converſed and eat with the Gentiles at Antioch, till the arrival of certain Jews made him ſeparate himſelf from the former, fearing them which were of the circumciſion: and PAUL, who reproached this prince of the apoſtles ſo harſhly for his hypocriſy, if he did not diſſemble to the elders the doctrine he taught to the Gentiles, did at leaſt diſſemble ſo far to the public, when he came to Jeruſalem and joined in the moſt ſolemn act, that the moſt rigid obſervers of the law could perform, as to expreſs a zeal for obſervances he did not much value, and for a law he thought abrogated; for that was the caſe, and that doctrine is inculcated throughout his epiſtles. In ſhort, he carried his indulgence ſo far, or he diſſembled ſo far, that he

* Gal. ii. † Acts xv. § Gal. ii.

be-

became as a Jew to the Jews, that he might gain the Jews, and to them that are without law, that is, to the Gentiles, as without law, that he might gain them too *. We have his own word for this, and he boaſts of it.

By ſuch prudent conduct, the goſpel was ſucceſsfully propagated, and converts flocked apace into the pale of chriſtianity from theſe different and oppoſite quarters; from which it is no wonder that they brought along with them ſeveral of their former uſages, rites, and ceremonies.

Abstinence from things ſtrangled and from blood had been conſtantly obſerved by the Jews, and was one of the conditions impoſed by the chriſtian church on the Gentiles received into it. This condition was confirmed by the apoſtolical conſtitutions, and enforced, I believe, by penalties more ſevere, in ſome of the imperial. It remained long in general practice among the Chriſtians of the Eaſt, and is perhaps even now practiſed by ſeveral of thoſe churches. But in the Weſt it was ſoon abandoned, and will not be revived again by the zeal of our acquaintance Dr. Delany. Abſtinence likewiſe from all kinds of nouriſhment, or the moſt rigorous faſting on ſolemn occaſions, had been obſerved in the jewiſh church, and is obſerved ſtill by the chriſtian churches of the Eaſt; for as to thoſe of the Weſt, they cannot be ſaid to faſt, when their manner is compared with that of the others, or with that of the Mahometans: they may be ſaid rather to feaſt very often, and only to change one kind of luxury for another.

These obſervances were of mere pagan or jewiſh original. Others were of a mixed kind. Moses had made the deſtruction of idolatrous worſhip a principal object of his law; and the

* 1 Cor. chap. ix.

zeal againſt images was great among the Jews. But they made a diſtinction, which the caſuiſts of the upper Egypt did not make, I preſume, formerly; and which thoſe of Mecca would not admit now. Images carved or emboſſed were held in horror, but a flat figure, either painted or embroidered, was allowed. A paſſage which I have read, quoted from MAIMONIDES *, is very expreſs and very clear on this ſubject. Pictures being thus introduced from judaiſm, ſtatues ſoon followed from the pagan worſhip: and the weſtern churches, if not the eaſtern, who kept more nearly to the jewiſh cuſtoms, were furniſhed like heathen temples. Confeſſion of ſins was in uſe among the heathen, ſo it was among the Jews, ſo it was, and ſo it is among Chriſtians, and ſeveral forms of it have been preſcribed. Penance and expiation followed both in the pagan and jewiſh churches: they were derived into the chriſtian, and they have been often coſtly in all three. One ſort of penance obtained in the two laſt indeed, which I do not remember to have obtained in the firſt, that of flagellation: a ſort of penance which has been ſince applied, as the learned MEIBOMIUS aſſures us, to a very different and unholy purpoſe. In the ſynagogue it is ſaid, that the penitents flogged one another, but your church, like a more indulgent mother, allows every one to flog himſelf, and to proportion the penance to the tenderneſs of his conſcience, and the tenderneſs of his ſkin.

BUT to what purpoſe ſhould I mention any more of theſe particulars? A multitude of ſuch ceremonies, not to ſay ſuperſtitious rites, have been adopted by the chriſtian church, tho neither commanded, nor even recommended by the goſpel. For this reaſon, the apoſtles do not ſeem to have been very in-

* LUD. com. ad hiſt. aethiop. Sed hoc capiendum de imagine, quae protuberat, quales ſunt figurae ac ſculpturae in palatiis, et his ſimiles. Talem igitur ſi quis fecerit, vapulat. Sin autem figura ſit depreſſa, vel coloribus expreſſa, uti illae, quae in tabulis menſiſvè fiunt, aut quae intextae operi textorio, pro licitis habentur.

tent

tent about theſe, or any other forms of external ſervice. They ſeem to have diſtinguiſhed rightly between the end and the means: the end immutable, as a religion given by God muſt neceſſarily be: the diſcipline, or means of ſupporting it, mutable, as the ordinances of men muſt be according to the viciſſitude of circumſtances, and the fluctuation of human affairs. But their ſucceſſors did, and have done ever ſince, the very reverſe of this, and it is aſtoniſhing to obſerve what a buſtle they made, and what conteſts they had about the time of keeping eaſter, and other points of diſcipline and ceremony which the apoſtles had not thought of importance enough to deſerve their deciſion, nor even their notice. All theſe fluctuated therefore extremely in the ſame churches, and varied in different churches, during the firſt ages of chriſtianity, and eſpecially until the ſynagogue was honorably buried *, if it can be ſaid to be ſo even at this day. I interpoſe this doubt, not only becauſe there remains a tang of judaiſm among ſeveral of the eaſtern ſects, which will not appear ſtrange to thoſe who know that the chriſtian church of Jeruſalem judaiſed during a ſucceſſion of fifteen biſhops, but becauſe the weſtern ſect, your pretended catholic church, inſtead of aſſerting evangelical freedom from the bondage of the moſaical law, or rather whilſt ſhe aſſerts it, has introduced many things from this very law, and has the front to juſtify them on the authority of it, under a new diſpenſation that takes all authority from it, according to St. Paul. Ointment, holy water, incenſe, tapers, the conſecration of altars, and the celebration of jubilees, are of this kind. But I think that your doctors would not found ſo high this authority, if theſe things were alone concerned. There are others which import them more, and which they have been obliged to eſtabliſh on jewiſh authority, for want of any better; and it is for the ſake of ſuch inſtitutions that they have deemed it

* —— Donec ſynagoga honorificè ſepulta fuerit. Card. Bon. de rebus litur. l. 1.

expedient

expedient to accuſtom men to reſpect this authority on other occaſions, on ſuch particularly as relate to the immediate ſervice of God, of which cuſtom, not reaſon nor revelation moſt certainly, has made them to paſs for eſſential parts. The divine right of tithes was eſtabliſhed by the law of Moses. By virtue of that law, the chriſtian prieſthood claim it. The naſci was the pontiff of the Jews, and the head of their church. From hence an argument the more for the ſupreme authority of the pope. Councils are derived from the ſanhedrin, and the whole ſyſtem of the hierarchy and of eccleſiaſtical regimen from the conſtitution of the jewiſh church. I take no notice here of the ſhare which paganiſm had in all that has been mentioned, either immediately or mediately thro judaiſm. Enough is ſaid for my preſent purpoſe: and obſervations of that ſort will be more neceſſary under another head.

Let thoſe now, who object to religion on account of external duties, rites, ceremonies, and eccleſiaſtical inſtitutions, learn to be more juſt in their cenſures. Let them learn to diſtinguiſh rightly between thoſe things which the goſpel requires, and thoſe which the church impoſes. If they do not make this diſtinction, their objections are trifling, and if they do make it, they may have the concurrence of every ſincere and intelligent Chriſtian along with them; for reaſons which are not theirs indeed, ſince they are intended to ſtrengthen and confirm, not to weaken nor explode religion. When we conſider how ſtrong the impreſſions of ſenſe are, and how they are apt to controul that which ſhould controul them, we may find, perhaps, very ſufficient reaſon to incline us to approve in general the uſe of ceremonies and the pomp of external ſervice in religion. To keep up a ſenſe of it in the minds of men, there ſeem to be but two ways. To ſtrike the ſenſes frequently by public and ſolemn acts of religious worſhip, and to heat the brain

brain by notions of an inward operation of the ſpirit, and of a ſort of myſtical devotion independent of outward forms, or even inconſiſtent with them. One of theſe leads to ſuperſtition, the other to enthuſiaſm. Both are ſilly; but the laſt is bad in this reſpect: it is leſs governable and leſs curable. Superſtition is folly. Enthuſiaſm is madneſs. It is good to be on our guard againſt both. But I am to ſpeak in this place of the firſt alone, and as to that, the ſolemn magnificence of a church, the grave and moving harmony of muſic, the pomp and order of ceremonies decently performed, the compoſed looks, and the myſtical veſtments of the prieſts who perform them, all this, I think, cannot fail to inſpire an awful reſpect, and to maintain a devout attention of mind in the generality. Here and there a man, perhaps, may take theſe ceremonies, and thoſe who perform them, for what they are, and not be impoſed upon by them, either before or after the celebration of ſuch rites as theſe. But during the celebration of them, whilſt the ſpectacle is before his eyes, and the ſound in his ears, I think that the ſame impreſſions will be made in ſome degree even on ſuch a man as this. You and I knew BETTERTON and Mrs. BARRY off the ſtage, as well as on it, and yet I am perſuaded neither of us could ever ſee JAFFIER and BELVIDERA without horror and compaſſion. I do not pretend to decide in the diſpute about the pomp of external ſervice. I only ſpeak according to what I have felt. But tho I do not take part, on the whole, for the uſe or diſuſe of church ceremonies, it may be allowed me to declare againſt the abuſe of them all, as a friend, not as an enemy to religion. It is certain that this abuſe has defeated the very end to which they were directed, or which ſerved as a reaſon for the introduction of them, and has ſubſtituted ſomething, which is not religion, in the place of it. Our ſpiritual guides have run into very wild extremes. Some have ſhewed a great diſregard to good

works,

works, and have talked of juſtifying faith alone, as the ſole means of ſalvation, and in contradiſtinction to good works, like the ſcotch preſbyterian parſon, who aſſured his brethren from the pulpit, that immorality had deſtroyed it's thouſands, but morality it's ten thouſands. Others have inſiſted much on good works, but they have confounded the nature of them. They have rather meaned, by good works, the practice of arbitrary duties, which eccleſiaſtical diſcipline has eſtabliſhed, or eccleſiaſtical authority recommended, and which are beggarly elements indeed, than the practice of thoſe moral duties which reaſon preſcribes as well as revelation. How much they prefer the former to the latter, may appear by the univerſal practice of moſt chriſtian countries. In ſome, the man who ſtabs his enemy goes to confeſſion, and his conſcience is never at quiet till he has purchaſed abſolution by money, or by penance, or by both. The woman who lies in the arms of her adulterer will leap out of bed, and knock her forehead, and beat her breaſt, at the tinkling of a little bell in the ſtreet. Nay in the country where I have paſſed ſo many years of my life, where bigottry is leſs prevalent, generally ſpeaking, than in others of the ſame communion, the poor man who has eat an egg in lent, when eggs have not been permitted by the biſhop, and who had perhaps nothing elſe to eat, cannot be abſolved of this heinous ſin by the ſame prieſt that might abſolve him for neglecting the worſhip, or offending againſt the law of God. The former ſin is of a blacker dye than theſe, and he muſt have recourſe for abſolution to an higher authority; which is an imitation of the Jews likewiſe, among whom any offence againſt the ritual law was puniſhed more ſeverely than crimes much more grievous in their nature, as I believe it has been obſerved already after Dr. SPENCER. But enough has been ſaid concerning duties added by the goſpel to natural religion, and duties added by the church to thoſe

of

of both. It is time to ſpeak of articles of faith, which make a third and laſt part of the analyſe of chriſtianity.

SECTION VIII.

It is this part that has furniſhed matter of ſtrife, contention, and all uncharitableneſs, even in, as well as from, the apoſtolical age. It is this that has added a motive the more, and one that is ſtronger than any other, to animoſity and hatred, to wars and maſſacres, and to that cruel principle which was never known till Chriſtians introduced it into the world, to perſecution for opinions, for opinions often of the moſt abſtract ſpeculation, and of the leaſt importance to civil or religious intereſts. It is this, in ſhort, whoſe effects have been ſo fatal to the peace and happineſs of mankind, that nothing which the enemies of religion can ſay on the ſubject will be exaggerated beyond the truth. But ſtill the charge they bring will be unjuſtly brought. Theſe effects have not been cauſed by the goſpel, but by the ſyſtem raiſed upon it. Not by the revelations of God, but by the inventions of men. We diſtinguiſhed before between the original and the traditional proofs, and we muſt diſtinguiſh here between the original and traditional matter of theſe revelations. The goſpel of Christ is one thing, the goſpel of St. Paul, and of all thoſe who have grafted after him on the ſame ſtock, is another.

I will not ſay, that one article of belief alone is neceſſary to make men Chriſtians, the belief that Jesus was the Meſſiah promiſed to the Jews, and foretold by their prophets. This may be the primary, but it is not the ſole object of our faith. There are other things doubtleſs contained in the revelation he made of himſelf, dependent on, and relative to this article,

without the belief of which I ſuppoſe that our chriſtianity would be very defective. But this I ſay; the articles of belief, which CHRIST himſelf exacted by what he ſaid, and by what he did, have been lengthened immeaſurably, and we may add both unneceſſarily and preſumptuouſly by others ſince his time. The ſyſtem of religion, which CHRIST publiſhed, and his evangeliſts recorded, is a complete ſyſtem to all the purpoſes of true religion, natural and revealed. It contains all the duties of the former, it enforces them by aſſerting the divine miſſion of the publiſher, who proved his aſſertions at the ſame time by his miracles, and it enforces the whole law of faith by promiſing rewards, and threatening puniſhments, which he declares he will diſtribute when he comes to judge the world. Beſides which, if we do not acknowledge the ſyſtem of belief and practice, which JESUS, the finiſher as well as author of our faith, left behind him to be in the extent in which he revealed and left it, complete and perfect, we muſt be reduced to the groſſeſt abſurdity, and to little leſs than blaſphemy.

THESE reaſons, which cut up the root of artificial theology, deſerve, for that reaſon, to be more fully explained. If we do not acknowledge them, we aſſume that the ſon of God, who was ſent by the father to make a new covenant with mankind, and to eſtabliſh a ſpiritual kingdom on the ruins of paganiſm, and the reformation at leaſt of judaiſm, executed his commiſſion imperfectly; we aſſume, that he died to redeem mankind from ſin, and from death the wages of ſin, but that he left them at the ſame time without ſufficient information concerning that faith in him, and that obedience to his law, which could alone make this redemption effectual to all the gracious purpoſes of it; ſince we might riſe to immortality indeed by the merits of his paſſion, but this reſurrection might be to damnation too, unleſs an entire faith in him, co-operating with our imperfect obedience,

obedience, juſtified and ſaved us. In ſhort, we aſſume, that they who were converted to chriſtianity by CHRIST himſelf, and who died before the ſuppoſed imperfection of his revelation had been ſupplied by the apoſtles, by PAUL particularly, lived and died without a ſufficient knowledge of the terms of ſalvation, than which nothing can be ſaid more abominable. Natural religion may be collected, ſlowly, perhaps, tho ſufficiently by natural reaſon, from the works of God, wherein he manifeſts his will to mankind. But a religion, revealed by God himſelf immediately, muſt have been complete and perfect from the firſt promulgation in the mind of every convert to it, according to all our ideas of order: and if we conſider it as a covenant of grace, the covenant muſt have been made at once, according to all theſe ideas, and all thoſe of juſtice. No new articles of belief, no new duties, could be made neceſſary to ſalvation afterwards, without changing the covenant: and at that rate how many new covenants might there not be? How often, I ſay it with horror, might not God change his mind?

WILL it be urged, as an anſwer to what has been ſaid, that the explanations and additions, which have been made, were made by the ſame authority that made the original covenant, in order to aſcertain the terms, and to ſecure the effect of it, and that there is therefore no reaſon to find fault that they were made? But if this ſhould be ſaid, inſtead of removing one abſurdity and profanation, it will only ſerve to advance another. The force of the objection reſts on the very aſſertion contained in the anſwer, on the ſameneſs of the authority. If the additions were not ſaid to be made by the ſame authority, they would be entitled to little regard, and the objection would vaniſh. But ſince they are ſaid to be ſo made, and ſince they make a change in the covenant, for a covenant is changed by additional conditions, tho the original remain ſtill in force, the

objection is confirmed by the anſwer; and a farther abſurdity ariſes from it, or the ſame abſurdity appears in a new light. If it was neceſſary that the apoſtles, who were filled with the holy ghoſt, or other inſpired perſons, ſhould publiſh by the aſſiſtance of the ſpirit any knowledge neceſſary to ſalvation, which JESUS had not taught, or explain the covenant of grace more perfectly than he had done, it follows, that the third perſon of the trinity was employed to aſſiſt the ſecond in making a more full and perfect publication of the goſpel, which comes too near the caſe of poor mortals, who want this aſſiſtance to receive and practiſe the goſpel as they ought, and to whom it is given to ſupply the imperfection of their nature. Upon the whole, have we not reaſon to diſtinguiſh with an holy fear between the original ſyſtem of chriſtianity, and the very beſt, if that could be aſcertained, of all thoſe diſcordant ſyſtems into which the pure ore of the goſpel has been ſo often melted down and caſt anew, during ſeventeen centuries, at different times, and every time with ſuch a mixture of human alloy, that no one of them can carry, without fraud, the image and ſuperſcription of our heavenly CAESAR?

CHRISTIANITY, as it ſtands in the goſpel, contains not only a complete but a very plain ſyſtem of religion; it is in truth the ſyſtem of natural religion, and ſuch it might have continued to the unſpeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the ſame ſimplicity with which it was originally taught by CHRIST himſelf. But this could not have happened, unleſs it had pleaſed the divine providence to preſerve the purity of it by conſtant interpoſitions, and by extraordinary means ſufficient to alter the ordinary courſe of things. Such a conſtant interpoſition, and ſuch extraordinary means, not being employed, chriſtianity was left very ſoon to ſhift for itſelf, in the midſt of a frantic world, and in an age when

when the moſt licentious reaſonings, and the moſt extravagant ſuperſtitions, in opinion and practice, prevailed univerſally under the reſpectable names of theology and metaphyſics; and when the Jews themſelves, on whoſe religion, and on the authority of whoſe ſcriptures chriſtianity was founded, had already gone far in corrupting both, by oral traditions and cabaliſtical whimſies, by a mixture of notions taken from the chaldaic philoſophy during their captivity, and from the grecian philoſophy ſince the expedition of ALEXANDER. The traces of theſe mixtures are diſcernable. Thoſe of greek origin moſt manifeſtly; and among them, thoſe of platoniſm are ſo ſtrongly marked, that it is impoſſible to miſtake them. This philoſophy was the very quinteſſence of the theology and metaphyſics, which PLATO, and PYTHAGORAS before him, had imported into Greece. It had been extracted by the intenſe heat of the warmeſt imagination that ever Greece produced, and had contributed more than any other ſyſtem of paganiſm to turn theiſts into enthuſiaſts, and to confirm that fondneſs for myſtery, without an air of which no doctrine could paſs for divine. What effect all theſe circumſtances had on chriſtianity, and how they ſerved to raiſe an intricate, voluminous, and contentious ſcience on foundations of the greateſt ſimplicity and plainneſs, it may be worth while to examine more particularly, and in ſuch a detail as the nature of theſe eſſays, which are not deſigned to be treatiſes, and my confined knowledge of antiquity, permit. The extent of one and the other will be ſufficient, perhaps, for our purpoſe.

SECTION IX.

MEN have accuſtomed themſelves to talk ſo vaguely about myſteries, that the very meaning of the word is become a myſtery. The whole new teſtament has been called the goſpel, and the whole goſpel a myſtery. Both very improperly; for the firſt confounds what ſhould be always diſtinguiſhed in favor of the original ſyſtem of chriſtianity: and the ſecond is abſurd in the higheſt degree, ſince nothing can be conceived to be more ſo than to predicate two contradictory terms of the ſame ſubject. To affirm that a thing is and is not exiſtent at the ſame time, is juſt as reaſonable as to affirm, that the goſpel is at once a revelation and a myſtery, a thing ſhewn and a thing hidden. That there are many ambiguous expreſſions, and many dark ſayings, in the goſpel, that there are many doctrines, which reaſon would never have taught, nor is able to comprehend now they are taught, cannot be denied. Nay the utmoſt human endeavours have been, and muſt be always, employed in vain to reduce the intire plan of divine wiſdom in the miſſion of CHRIST, and the redemption of man, to a coherent, intelligible, and reaſonable ſyſtem of doctrines and facts. Is it ſtrange that it ſhould be ſo? It could not be otherwiſe. Two of the evangeliſts recorded, as witneſſes, what they ſaw and heard in this extraordinary conjuncture, and two others what they were told about it. Not the whole indeed; for then the world could not have contained the books that would have been written, but as much as was neceſſary, and even a little more than was ſtrictly ſo, to account for the eſtabliſhment of the ſpiritual kingdom of CHRIST, as it is called improperly enough, and to explain the laws of it, and the conditions of admiſſion into it. If a great prince ſhould ariſe in any country, make an intire revolution in the conſtitution of it,

it, reform ſome, and aboliſh others of the antient laws and cuſtoms, and eſtabliſh a new government on new principles of government, would it not be ſufficient for the people to know his right in general, and the meaſures of their obedience in particular? Would they complain, if ſome things eſſential to neither, and ſcarce relative to the latter, were obſcurely mentioned in any of his declarations or conſtitutions, that they wanted a complete ſyſtem of the government to which they ſubmitted themſelves, and were therefore obliged to ſupply on their own authority what they had not received on the authority of their legiſlator. I think they would make no ſuch complaint. Reaſonable men I am ſure would not. To ſuch, the whole would appear plain enough, and they would reſolve to believe and obey it in the obvious and literal ſenſe, whilſt a few buſy, overcurious, and deſigning politicians might render what was plain, intricate, and two or three dark expreſſions the ſubject of perpetual diſpute, and irreconcileable diviſion, by their refinements. Thus the peace of ſociety might be broken, and the very end of government be defeated, not by any want of neceſſary information, but by an affectation of knowing more than the legiſlator thought it neceſſary that they ſhould know. Such as I have repreſented theſe politicians in civil government, ſuch have divines and metaphyſicians ſhewn themſelves in religion: and it is full as unjuſt to charge the miſchiefs that have followed in one caſe, on religion, as it would be to charge thoſe that would follow in the other, on government.

The only way to have prevented ſuch miſchiefs as theſe from ariſing in the city of God would have been this, that Chriſtians ſhould have adhered cloſely to the goſpel, as it was taught by Christ himſelf; that they ſhould have thought it, as he thought it, ſufficient for them; have received implicitly what is plainly revealed in it, and have avoided all dogmatical deciſions

ſions on things obſcure or doubtful. Explanations in all theſe caſes ſerve only to multiply diſputes, and to eſtabliſh religion, on human, inſtead of divine, authority. This affords a rule invariable as God himſelf. The other fluctuates as the opinions, and even the intereſts of men vary. Under one, Chriſtians might have continued united in the ſame communion, and even members of the ſame family, friends and brethren. Under the other it is impoſſible that this, which is the great object of chriſtianity, ſhould be obtained, and therefore I am willing to believe, that they who had been the immediate diſciples of the ſaviour preached his goſpel in a ſpirit of union, in ſo ſimple a ſtyle, and in ſo ſtrict and ſcrupulous a conformity to the revelations he had made, in what form ſoever the writings of theſe men have come down to us, thro very interpolating hands, that there neither was nor could be any diviſion among them, nor any ſeeds of diviſion ſowed by them. He who compares the epiſtles of JAMES, of PETER and JOHN, ſuch as we have them, with thoſe of PAUL, and all theſe with the doctrines of the goſpel, will be perhaps of this opinion; at leaſt he will have no ground to ſay of the three firſt, that they were authors of new goſpels, as he will have grounds to ſay of the laſt, and as the laſt does in effect ſay of himſelf. He will be of this opinion too the more eaſily, on account of a very ſenſible difference in the manner as well as the matter of their writings. There is a moſt remarkable and amiable anecdote to this purpoſe mentioned by ſome writers, and for which the authority of JEROM is cited. St. JOHN had been long confined in the iſland of Pathmos, to which DOMITIAN had baniſhed him, and where it is pretended that he writ the apocalypſe, that ſtrange rhapſody of unintelligible revelations, as they are called moſt abſurdly. It is much more probable, and more for the honor of the evangeliſt, as well as of chriſtianity, to believe that they were compoſed by CERINTHUS, by a viſionary of the ſame name

name as that of the apoſtle, or by ſome other enthuſiaſt. They were not admitted into the canon at Laodicea, nor would have been ever admitted to diſgrace it, if JUSTIN, IRENAEUS, ORIGEN, and TERTULLIAN, in whom the love of myſtery was a kind of delirium, and after their example ſeveral of the other fathers, had not crowded them into the canon by receiving them as canonical. The anecdote I am about to produce will ſhew how far St. JOHN was, tho his goſpel gave him the title of the theologian, from multiplying and propagating myſteries, and how he retained that character of plainneſs and ſimplicity, which he had acquired in the ſchool of his divine maſter. DOMITIAN dead, and NERVA emperor, the holy evangeliſt returned to his church at Epheſus, threeſcore years after the death of JESUS. Not only the goſpels, his own among the reſt, which it is ſaid that he writ at the deſire of his people as ſoon as he returned to them; but even the epiſtles were then writ, and the ſyſtem of chriſtianity had taken, in moſt of the churches at leaſt, the form which PAUL had given it. If the good old man, feeble and decrepit, was unable to make long ſermons, it appeared that he did not think them very neceſſary neither; for when he ſpoke in the public aſſemblies, the ſum of what he ſaid was, children love one another. The people of Epheſus, where PAUL had been, where he boaſted that he had fought with beaſts after the manner of men, where he had certainly made long and myſtical diſcourſes, were diſappointed and diſſatisfied with the ſuccinct and plain doctrine of their biſhop; but when they expoſtulated with him upon it, they had a very ſhort and deciſive anſwer, this the Lord commands: and if you do this, it is ſufficient. He ſpoke to men who believed already in JESUS the Meſſiah, and in all that he had juſt before recorded in the goſpel he publiſhed at their requeſt, after his return from Pathmos. Whatever others might think, he thought that the goſpel wanted no further explanations, nor

extenſions, and contented himſelf therefore to recal to their memory, on every occaſion, that fundamental article of the law of nature, and the law of the goſpel, univerſal benevolence.

THE character of St. JOHN was not that of St. PAUL. One had been formed in the boſom of JESUS; called to be a diſciple, and commiſſioned to be an apoſtle, inſtructed by the doctrine and example of his maſter. He had, like PETER and the reſt, no other ſcience, and what that was the four evangeliſts tell us. PAUL, on the contrary, had been educated in the ſchools of the law, ſuch as the law was become in thoſe days, when oral tradition, cabaliſtical myſteries, and ſcraps of pythagorician, platonic, and even ſtoician doctrines, had been blended with it, and compoſed the moſt extravagant ſyſtems of philoſophy and religion. The maſters of all this learning were the phariſees, whoſe ſect began probably two hundred years before CHRIST, and was in the higheſt reputation when he came into the world. Of this ſect was PAUL; and he continued in it till he was about forty years old, profiting in the religion of the Jews above many of his equals---- exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers----and perſecuting the church of God *. After this, he, who had reſiſted ſo many miracles, was converted by a miracle, which he and his amanuenſis LUKE have related. He was called by God himſelf in a great light, which was always underſtood to denote ſome divine preſence, to be an apoſtle, a choſen veſſel, repleniſhed with gifts of the holy ghoſt, and overflowing with grace. His peculiar deſtination was to preach CHRIST, whom God had revealed in him, among the heathen: and this he began to do immediately, for being made an apoſtle by a diſtinct commiſſion from the reſt, he conferred not with fleſh

* Epiſt. to the Gal. chap. i.

and

and blood, nor went up to Jeruſalem to them which were apoſtles before him, but preached as ſoon as his eyes were opened, as he had received the impoſition of hands, and as he had been baptiſed, by virtue of a particular inſpiration, that goſpel of which he ſpeaks to the Galatians with ſo much confidence, that he pronounces every one who ſhould preach any thing different from it, himſelf, an angel from heaven, and therefore moſt certainly even the other apoſtles, accurſed. It was not till three years after his journey into Arabia, and his return to Damaſcus, that he went to Jeruſalem, where he communicated privately to them, which were of reputation, the goſpel he preached to the Gentiles; for he might want their approbation, tho he did not want their information nor advice: and this he obtained ſo far, that they gave him and BARNABAS the right hand of fellowſhip, that theſe two ſhould preach the goſpel to the Gentiles, and they, that is, the other apoſtles, to the children of Iſrael.

THIS ſhort deduction of facts, taken from St. PAUL's own account of himſelf, and in which he aſſured the Galatians before God that he lied not, may ſerve to introduce an obſervation touched upon already, and more eaſily made than explained. In the laſt chapter of his epiſtle to the Romans, he calls the goſpel he preached, my goſpel; which expreſſion he cannot be ſuppoſed to have uſed, ſays Mr. LOCKE in his note on the paſſage very juſtly, unleſs he knew that what he preached had ſomething in it, that diſtinguiſhed it from what was preached by others. But what that was we are left by this able commentator to ſeek. It was not plainly, what he ſays it was plainly, the myſtery of God's purpoſe of taking in the Gentiles to be his people——and without ſubjecting them to circumciſion, or the law of MOSES. If this myſtery, ſo inconſiſtent with the declarations and practice of JESUS, was revealed to PAUL,

it was revealed to the apoſtles too, ſince they preached and publiſhed the glad tidings of ſalvation indifferently to Jews and Gentiles; in doing which had this myſtery been revealed to him excluſively of them, they would have been apoſtles of PAUL in this inſtance, rather than of CHRIST. If the exemption of the gentile converts from circumciſion, and other obſervances of the moſaical law, was the myſtery, the myſtery was explained by the decree of the council of Jeruſalem; by which nothing more was required of the Gentiles, than to abſtain from idolatry, or meats offered to idols, from fornication, and from blood. St. PAUL aſſumed, indeed, that not only the vocation of the Gentiles, but this exemption in favor of them and of the Jews too, were myſteries revealed particularly to him. It is evident, however, that the other apoſtles and the elders looked on it as no myſtery at all, and that they treated it as a matter of diſcipline: ſo that a queſtion may ariſe, whether St. PAUL was, what the pope pretends to be, above the council, or the council above him. The apoſtles had given no directions to inſiſt, that the Gentiles ſhould, or ſhould not, ſubmit to circumciſion, and to the yoaks of the law, which St. PETER ſcruples not to ſay, in his ſpeech on that occaſion, were ſo heavy, that "neither they nor their fathers were able to bear them *." In a word, by the opinion St. JAMES delivered, and by the whole tenor of the decree, it is manifeſt, that the miſtaken zeal for the law, which ſome of the Jews retained after their converſion, and perhaps the immoderate zeal of St. PAUL for an immediate and total abolition of it, had given riſe to this diſpute, and that it was determined not as a point on which the divine purpoſe had been revealed to PAUL, or any one elſe, but according to what has been juſt now ſaid, as a point of diſcipline left to the diſcretion of the apoſtles and elders, whoſe ſole regard was to prevent any ſchiſm in a church hardly yet

* Acts chap. xv.

formed,

formed, and who for that reaſon, whilſt they indulged the Jews in circumciſion and other ritual obſervances of their law, exempted the Gentiles from the far greateſt and heavieſt part of them.

But there is ſomething more to be obſerved. If the purpoſe of God was to take the Gentiles to be his people under the Meſſiah in this manner, if their abſtaining from jewiſh rites and ceremonies was a poſitive law of God under the new covenant, as the abſtaining from idolatry was both under the new and under the old, how came it to paſs, that the Meſſiah himſelf gave no inſtruction about it to his apoſtles, when he ſent them to preach his goſpel to all nations, and, as we may ſay, to people his kingdom, which they did chiefly out of the gentile world? Why was the revelation of this important myſtery, ſo neceſſary to be publiſhed at the very firſt publication of the goſpel, if it was the eternal purpoſe of God, or elſe not neceſſary at all, reſerved for St. Paul, who was then a perſecutor, not a preacher of the goſpel, and whoſe apoſtleſhip did not begin before the converſions? Shall we ſay that this eternal purpoſe of the father was unknown to the ſon? We ſhall blaſpheme if we do. Shall we ſay that it was known to him, but that he neglected to communicate it to the firſt preachers of his goſpel, and gave them imperfect inſtructions? The profanation will be little leſs. Theſe queſtions, and ſome others of the ſame kind, will not be eaſily anſwered, unleſs it be by men who are never at a loſs to account for the abſurdities that they impute to the divine conduct, by ſuppoſing it directed according to ſuch partialities as are proportioned to the lowneſs of their minds: but the pertneſs, not to ſay the impudence, of heſe men deſerving no regard, we muſt ſeek another ſolution of the difficulty, and endeavor to find what it was that diſtinguiſhed St. Paul in this reſpect from the other apoſtles,

and

and gave him a reaſon for calling the goſpel he preached his own goſpel.

SOME ſolution of this ſort may occur to us, perhaps, if we reflect on what was mentioned above concerning the difference between the manner in which St. PAUL preached the goſpel, and that of the other apoſtles; which difference marks very ſtrongly the different ſchools wherein they had been inſtructed, and had formed the habits that characteriſed them, the ſchool of CHRIST and the ſchool of GAMALIEL. From one of theſe the apoſtles had brought great modeſty and gentleneſs of temper, a ſhort, familiar, and ſimple ſtyle, like that of their Lord and maſter. From the other St. PAUL carried into the apoſtleſhip, with a great ſtock of jewiſh learning, a great deal of that aſſuming air which is apt to accompany much learning, or the opinion of it: and accordingly we find him obliged more than once in his epiſtles to excuſe his boaſting, and the value he ſet on himſelf, by ſuch humble expreſſions as a man who had not been full of the holy ghoſt might, in his caſe, have taken a pride in uſing. He carried with him likewiſe, from the phariſaical ſchools, a great profuſion of words, and of involved unconnected diſcourſe, even on thoſe ſubjects which required to be the moſt clearly and diſtinctly developed, if they were to be inſiſted upon at all, and not to be paſſed over in ſilence rather, or touched very tranſiently, as they had been by the other apoſtles. The other apoſtles were all evangeliſts, that is, they were publiſhers of the glad tydings of ſalvation: they declared to the world that the kingdom of the Meſſiah, that is, the ſpiritual kingdom, was begun, and they taught men the indiſpenſable conditions of belief and practice, in order to be admitted into it. Farther than was neceſſary to this purpoſe, they did not affect to carry their doctrines. They meaned to convince, not to perplex the minds of men. They knew

knew that by doing the laſt, they ſhould obſtruct the firſt; or ſhould give great advantage to the falſe doctors that were ariſen, and were to ariſe to corrupt chriſtianity. St. PAUL was a looſe paraphraſer, a cabaliſtical commentator, as much at leaſt as any antient or modern rabbin; and tho his goſpel was, in the fundamental principles of it, the ſame as theirs, yet he mingled it up with ſo much of his own theology, that he might not improperly, and in one ſenſe, call it his own, and that we may call him the father of artificial theology. Not content to reveal myſterious truths in propoſitions whoſe terms were intelligible, tho the manner of being of theſe truths was ſtill a myſtery, which is no objection to the belief of any thing contained in a revelation once proved to be divine, he amplified them, deſcanted upon them, opened the whole oeconomy of divine wiſdom from ADAM to CHRIST, and accounted for the ſeveral diſpenſations of God to man. The original goſpel, ſuch as the other apoſtles preached it, was a plain ſyſtem of belief and practice, fitted for all times, and proportioned to all underſtandings. St. PAUL's goſpel, if it may be ſaid to be fitted as much as the others for all times, of which I doubt, cannot be ſaid to be proportioned to all underſtandings. It is evidently not ſo to the underſtandings of the deepeſt divines, and the moſt ſubtile metaphyſicians; ſince they have been wrangling about it from that time to this, and have eſtabliſhed the moſt oppoſite doctrines on the ſame texts, to the breach of all charity, and the diſturbance of the chriſtian world *.

IT

* I will mention a little more fully, in this note, what I omitted in the text. All that is ſaid there, is ſaid relatively to received interpretations and opinions, ſuch as Mr. LOCKE would have admitted, and were therefore proper to be followed in reaſoning againſt him. But if I am to ſpeak my own opinion; the matter in queſtion may be decided more ſhortly, and on the whole more conſiſtently. St. PAUL then might very well talk of his goſpel, even in contradiſtinction to that of CHRIST; ſince he taught ſeveral doctrines which had no foundation in that of CHRIST, and others,

It may be ſaid that ſome paſſages in the four goſpels, and even ſome expreſſions of CHRIST recorded in them, have been liable to various interpretations, and have produced ſuch diſputes and conteſts as theſe which I aſcribe to the writings of St. PAUL. But altho this be undoubtedly true, the difference between the original goſpel, and that of St. PAUL, is very real, and very manifeſt. One is a plain and clear ſyſtem of religion, with here and there a doubtful phraſe that caſts no obſcurity on the reſt. The other is an intricate and dark ſyſtem, with here and there an intelligible phraſe that caſts no light on the reſt, but is rather loſt in the gloom of the whole. By faith I may believe, but by faith I cannot underſtand. A propoſition, the terms of which are unintelligible, is an abſolute myſtery: to ſay that we are bound to believe myſteries in this ſenſe is itſelf nonſenſe; to ſay we do believe them is a lie. But a propoſition, the terms of which are intelligible, may be an object of faith, tho we underſtand by it nothing more than the terms; when it is ſupported, as was ſaid above, by divine authority,

others, as I have ſaid, that were directly repugnant both to the word and example of the Meſſiah. CHRIST profeſſed judaiſm, and declared himſelf ſent to the Jews alone, and not even to the Samaritans, ſo poſitively, that when he commiſſioned his apoſtles, he may be, and, to make him conſiſtent, ought to be underſtood to have meaned no more, than to ſend them to the Jews diſperſed in all nations. St. PAUL, on the contrary, inſtead of grafting chriſtianity on judaiſm, inſiſted on an entire abolition of the latter; to which, however, he had conformed moſt hypocritically on more occaſions than one; and his doctrine became, not at once, but in time, the doctrine of the chriſtian church. This may appear ſtrange to thoſe who read, without a free conſideration of what they read: and it will appear ſtill more ſtrange to them to find a pagan emperor, and a great enemy both of Jews and Chriſtians, introduced as an inſtrument appointed by God to accompliſh his ſecret deſigns in confirming the doctrine of St. PAUL's goſpel; and yet ADRIAN is ſo introduced by SULPICIUS SEVERUS; for he ſays, that the chriſtian church at Jeruſalem having had till that time none but Jews in the epiſcopal chair, and the greateſt part of the faithful there believing in JESUS CHRIST without departing from the legal ceremonies, that edict of ADRIAN, which hindered Jews from going to Jeruſalem was of great uſe to chriſtianity; by which we muſt underſtand the chriſtianity of St. PAUL's goſpel, and not that of CHRIST's.

nay

nay often when it is ſupported only by human. A man, upon whoſe knowledge and ſincerity I ought to depend, reveals to me a few mathematical truths, which, in certain circumſtances, it is neceſſary I ſhould know, and troubles me neither with the demonſtrations which I might not be able to comprehend, nor with many corollaries to be drawn from them which I do not want. Another, the ſcholar of the firſt, and of leſs authority than his maſter, brings me a paper filled with diagrams, and letters and figures, which he aſſures me contains demonſtrations of the former truths, and explanations of ſeveral corollaries deducible from them. I underſtand neither. Thoſe whom I conſult appear to underſtand them as little as myſelf, by their diſputes about the meaning of them. The truths which were clear and ſufficient for me in ſimple propoſitions, as I received them firſt, are involved in myſtery; and then incoherent, figurative diſcourſe thickens the cloud.

Let any man read the epiſtles we have of this apoſtle's writing, after he has read the goſpels; let him read the former, as he would read any other books of philoſophy or theology; let him call in Mr. Locke to his aſſiſtance, who has ſucceeded better, perhaps, than any other expoſitor, by happier conjectures, and no greater licence of paraphraſe, in giving an air of coherence, conſiſtency, and rationality to theſe epiſtles, and in making them intelligible: ſuch a man will not be able, after all his pains, to ſhew any one myſtery that is left unfolded in the conciſe language of the goſpel taught by Christ and his apoſtles, that has been rendered leſs myſterious by the prolixity of St. Paul. St. Paul rather doubles myſtery than ſimpliſies it, if I may ſay ſo, and adds every where a myſtery of words to a myſtery of things. That they who have, ſince his time, and after his example, grafted theology on revelation,

extended the doctrines of it, explained and applied the prophecies, types and figures, invented new ones of every ſort, and raiſed a variety of diſcord and ſyſtems on the ſame ſimple and uniform plan, ſhould be for the moſt part very little intelligible is not wonderful. He, who has clear and diſtinct ideas in his mind, will write clearly and diſtinctly: and the author who puzzles an attentive reader is firſt puzzled himſelf, how common ſoever it be, in the ſcience we ſpeak of here particularly, to ſee thoſe admired the moſt who are the leaſt underſtood. That has been the caſe of theſe men. They have pretended to inſtruct others on ſubjects, on which it was impoſſible they ſhould have clear and diſtinct ideas, or indeed any ideas at all. But that St. PAUL ſhould write confuſedly and unintelligibly, he who was illuminated by the holy ghoſt, that he might enlighten the Gentiles, and he who received all he taught by immediate revelation, muſt be always a problem not eaſy to reſolve. "He was, it is ſaid, a man of quick thought "and warm temper —— verſed in the writings of the old "teſtament, full of the doctrines of the new —— ſo that "one may conſider him, when he was writing, as beſet with a "crowd of thoughts, all ſtriving for utterance *." But are we not to conſider him too, when he was writing, as a man under the influence of actual inſpiration? And was not divine inſpiration ſufficient to keep him from falling into thoſe faults, want of order and perſpicuity, into which none but the meaneſt of uninſpired writers are apt to fall? Mr. LOCKE ſhould have thought ſo, ſince St. PAUL ſays, that the ſpirits of the prophets are ſubject to the prophets †: and he in his paraphraſe, that Chriſtians, however filled with the holy ghoſt —— are not hurried away by any compulſion. A neglect of eloquence, and the ornaments of ſpeech, became an apoſtle. But it is hard to diſcern how a neglect of order and perſpicuity

* LOCKE's preface to his paraphraſe &c.

† 1 Cor. c. iv.

ſhould

ſhould be apoſtolical, ſince the deſign of ſuch a miſſion is to inſtruct and to convince.

SECTION X.

After ſaying ſo much of the unintelligibility of Paul's goſpel, truth authoriſes me to add, that where it is intelligible it is often abſurd, or profane, or trifling. Is not the doctrine of paſſive obedience, which he teaches, moſt intelligibly abſurd? Is not that of abſolute predeſtination moſt intelligibly profane? Is not one of them repugnant to common ſenſe? Is not the other as repugnant to all the ideas of God's moral perfections? Would not either of them be ſufficient to ſhake the credit even of Christ's goſpel, if they were contained in it?

But it remains that I give an inſtance of the moſt intelligible trifling that we find in this goſpel, and this inſtance will lead us to obſerve in what manner chriſtianity was taught and propagated by the firſt converts to it in their public aſſemblies, and how eaſily extenſions of it, or engraftments on it might be made. We hear much of the extraordinary gifts of the ſpirit that were beſtowed on theſe converts, ſuch as propheſying, working miracles, and ſpeaking in unknown tongues, which are enumerated, with ſeveral others, by St. Paul in the twelfth chapter of his firſt epiſtle to the corinthian proſelytes. The laſt of theſe gifts belonged more properly to thoſe who were deſigned to be miſſionaries of the goſpel, that they might be able to convert unbelievers more effectually in their diſperſion over different countries. But where churches were eſtabliſhed, St. Paul * prefers the uſe of the language of the place, diſlikes

* 1 Cor. c. iv.

the affectation of using any other, and indulges it only when there is an interpreter at hand. The gift of prophecy, by which he intends not only prediction, but singing of psalms and teaching the doctrines of religion in their public assemblies, is that to which he assigns the first place. Now this gift every one might exercise, even the women. They are ordered, indeed, by some passages, to keep silence in the churches *, and if they will know any thing, to ask their husbands at home †: and yet it is plain, by other passages of the same epistle, that they were allowed to prophesy, as it is called, and that they did so before the congregations. This apparent contradiction is reconciled by assuming, that tho they were not on every ordinary occasion to act the part of teachers and instructors, yet they were not debarred from it, when by any extraordinary motion and impulse of the spirit they were determined to exercise this function. The only dispute was, whether they should exercise it covered or uncovered: and this material point was decided by St. Paul. He let the Corinthians, among whom this dispute had arisen, know, "that the head of every man "is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the "head of Christ is God" —— from whence he concludes that a man, "who is the image and glory of God —— "having his head covered, dishonoreth his head;" but that a woman, "who is the glory of the man, with her head unco-"vered dishonoreth her head; for that is all one as if she "were shaven §." This argumentation may not appear very conclusive, nor indeed very intelligible, to us; but it was both, I doubt not, to the Corinthians, and in all cases it serves to shew that both sexes had their revelations, and a right to publish them.

* 1 Cor. c. xiv. † Ib. c. xi. § Ib.

THE

The apoſtle * proceeds afterwards to give directions for keeping better order in the public aſſemblies, which were held with great confuſion, whilſt every one was impatient to ſhew his gifts, and they could not ſtay to do it one by one. Even theſe directions left room for ſome confuſion ſtill. Two or three might propheſy at the ſame meeting, one after another, and the reſt of the congregation were to judge; which not only begat debate, but cauſed interruptions, that uſually beget altercation. That this muſt have happened we may aſſure ourſelves, ſince by one of the rules St. Paul preſcribes, if any thing was revealed to a ſitter-by, the ſpeaker was to hold his peace. Simon the magician would have bought the power of beſtowing the gifts of the holy ghoſt by the impoſition of his hands, as he ſaw them beſtowed by Peter and John; and Simon had embraced chriſtianity, and had been baptiſed. In an age, therefore, when a communication of theſe gifts was eſteemed ſo common and ſo eaſily given, it could not but be, that multitudes thought they had ſome or more of theſe gifts, and eſpecially that of propheſying, and that, as ſome imagined piouſly, they had inſpirations when they had them not; ſo others, even this magician, tho the apoſtles had rejected his offer, affected impiouſly to have them. It could not be hard to paſs falſe revelations on a world, on whom it was ſo eaſy to paſs falſe miracles; which this very Simon, and other ſuppoſed magicians, and real impoſtors, did very frequently.

This opinion of divine illuminations and revelations being once eſtabliſhed, an abſtruſe theology being once grafted on the plain doctrines which the goſpel taught, and an example being ſet of extending the ſyſtem beyond its native ſimplicity by collecting paſſages here and there, and by comparing and

* 1 Cor. chap. xiv.

applying

applying them in a cabaliſtical manner, even according to the ſound very often, rather than the import of the words, the natural conſequences did not fail to follow among the illiterate and ſuperſtitious Jews and Gentiles, who were the firſt converts to chriſtianity. I need not ſtay to point out theſe conſequences. Hiſtory antient and modern does that ſufficiently, and even our own experience in ſome degree. Every man, who has heard of the language and behaviour of men poſſeſſed with fanaticiſm, may point them out to himſelf. But enthuſiaſm, ſuperſtition, and the abuſe of religion were not confined to the moſt illiterate. A multitude of new doctors aroſe, all of whom pretended to have divine knowledge, and ſome to be divine perſons. A multitude of doctors formed a multitude of ſects: the followers of SIMON the magician, as he was thought by thoſe who were no conjurers themſelves, the diſciples of CARPOCRAS and of CERINTHUS, of CERDON, MARCION, and ſoon after theſe of MANES, the Nicholaites, the Valentinians, and many others; for they grew up apace.

THESE men had the old teſtament and ſeveral goſpels and ſeveral apoſtolical epiſtles before them, for no canon of ſcripture was yet ſettled, nor till more than three centuries afterwards; tho it may ſeem not a little extraordinary that this ſhould have been neglected, whilſt the tradition, that could alone eſtabliſh the authenticity of theſe writings, was freſh enough to be itſelf authentic. The writings, however, that paſſed all for authentic, in ſome or other of the chriſtian churches, theſe men had. Nay ſome of them had been hearers of the apoſtles, and had begun to dogmatiſe at the ſame time. Neither they nor their ſucceſſors had the ſame ſpirit. But they aſſumed the ſame liberty, and by adding allegory to allegory, type to type, myſtery to myſtery, and one arbitrary interpretation to another, chriſtianity became a confuſed chaos of theology. Such it continued

nued long, and ſuch it is, in ſome degree, even now; for tho many of the ſyſtems that were formed out of it, and that were coeval with it, wore out in the ſpace of three or four centuries, many others ſprung up from the ſame ſeeds, and were nurſed into maturity and ſtrength by the ſame culture. Nay ſome of the ſame ſeeds produce now and then, even at this day, and in our own country, a feeble weed or two in the vineyard of the Lord. Some of the churches, which were eſtabliſhed by the apoſtles or their immediate ſucceſſors, and which maintained a charitable correſpondence together, might maintain likewiſe, for ought we know, with greater purity of manners, a greater purity of doctrine. But we muſt not believe, on the firſt head, that they who diſſented from them, and were therefore called heretics by them, fell into ſuch abominations as have been repreſented by IRENAEUS, TERTULLIAN, EPIPHANIUS, and other fathers, who were very choleric, very foul-mouthed, and often guilty of ſcandalous exaggeration. A charge that may be brought with the more confidence, ſince it is ſupported by their own writings that are extant, and by men of the greateſt authority in eccleſiaſtical literature; and ſince it can be neither denied, evaded, nor excuſed by thoſe who are the leaſt willing to own it. As we muſt not believe all that the fathers advance on this head, ſo muſt we not believe on the other, as many good people ſeem to do, that the primitive Chriſtians had an uniform plan of theology, explained as we explain it, and underſtood as we underſtand it. The ſyſtem ſwelled inſenſibly faſter among ſome, more ſlowly among others: and they ſeemed to agree much better than they did in reality, as it appeared when criticiſm came in faſhion, and they were obliged to expreſs themſelves with more preciſion concerning the principal articles of their faith.

SEC-

SECTION XI.

All theſe ſects may be comprehended under the general name of gnoſtics, or learned and illuminated. At firſt they affected to have it thought, that they alone were both one and the other, and to deſpiſe ſuch as could not diſcover all they pretended to diſcover of the hidden ſenſe of the ſcriptures, and of the myſteries of chriſtianity. But the orthodox grew, in time, as much gnoſtics as others: and we ſee that Clement of Alexandria * thought it neceſſary to be ſo, in order to be truly religious. Illumination, and the gifts of the ſpirit, ſerved to eſtabliſh this chriſtianity: but philoſophy, and the ſciences, were of uſe to confirm and improve it. No ages nor countries could be more prepared to adopt every theological and metaphyſical notion, even the moſt extravagant and leaſt intelligible, than thoſe wherein the chriſtian religion was firſt publiſhed and propagated. Egypt, and the eaſtern kingdoms, had been famous ſchools of a reputed divine philoſophy. Pythagoras had gone to them all. Plato had gone to the former only. But what he had not acquired at the firſt hand, from the gymnoſophiſts, the followers of Zoroaster, the magi and other oriental maſters, he acquired at the ſecond, by converſing with the italic philoſophers, and by a ſtudy of their writings. He ſays ſomewhere, that the Greeks improved and mended all they borrowed from the barbarians, which I am far from believing to be true. But if Pythagoras and he carried any ſcience farther than their maſters, I incline to think it was the moſt fantaſtic.

Since the works of Plato are in our hands, we may ſpeak of him and his theology with more aſſurance, than of thoſe

* Strom. lib. 7.

who

who went before him, or of their doctrines. Thoſe of Orpheus, or thoſe that paſſed under ſuch a name in antient Greece, were chiefly mythological; thoſe of Pythagoras, ſymbolical; and thoſe of Plato metaphyſical, with a mixture of the other two. Nothing could be more proper, nor effectual, to promote fantaſtical knowledge, than a method of philoſophiſing by fables, ſymbols, and almoſt a perpetual allegory. But the founder of the academy did more. He poiſoned the very ſource of all real knowledge, by inducing men to believe, that their minds are capable of abſtracting, as no human mind can abſtract, and of acquiring ideas, that it is impoſſible any human mind ſhould perceive. He pretended to raiſe a myſtic ladder, on which we might not only clamber up by dint of meditation to a region of pure intellect, wherein alone is knowledge, and leave ſenſible objects behind us, concerning which nothing better than opinion is to be had, but find at the head of it incorporeal eſſences, immaterial forms, ſpiritual beings, and perhaps the logos or ſecond god, as the ſupreme God is ſuppoſed to have been at the head of the ladder Jacob ſaw in his dream. Angels went up and down one: philoſophers were to go up and down the other.

This philoſopher dealed little in phyſics: and he was in the right to neglect them. Metaphyſics ſerved his purpoſe better. Hypotheſes of the former kind muſt be founded in ſome real knowledge, how high ſoever the top of the ladder reaches, the foot muſt ſtand firm on the earth. But hypotheſes of the other kind are more eaſy to be framed, and leſs eaſy to be controuled. Thus, for inſtance, an intellectual world being once aſſumed, wherein the ideas, the forms, the patterns of all that exiſt in the ſenſible world reſide, it was eaſy to people it with numberleſs intellectual, that is, ſpiritual, that is, immaterial, that is, ſimple beings without extenſion or ſolidity, that is, beings of

which theſe refiners had negative, but no poſitive ideas. They were at liberty afterwards to ſuppoſe whatever relations they pleaſed between theſe beings, and between them and men. Metaphyſical hypotheſes, in ſhort, are not content to account for what may be by what is, nor to improve ſcience according to the conditions of our nature, by raiſing probability on the foundations of certainty; but the makers of them affect to range in the immenſe void of poſſibility, with little or no regard to actuality, and begin very often, as well as end, in ſuppoſition. Not only their ſyſtems are hypothetical, but the firſt principles of them, and the very ideas and notions, which compoſe them, are hypothetical too.

Such a philoſopher, ſuch a teacher of imaginary and fantaſtic knowledge, Plato was. Notwithſtanding which, or for which reaſon rather, he grew ſoon into great vogue in Greece, and in thoſe countries where grecian literature was propagated after the expedition of Alexander. This philoſophy could not fail to be well received in thoſe countries, from the ſchools of which it had been derived originally; and it floriſhed accordingly, and triumphed, as it were, over all others in ſome parts of Aſia, and in Egypt, whilſt it made its way into Italy, and was propagated weſtward thro the roman empire. The Jews of Paleſtine, and they who lived under the protection of the Ptolemies, had taken a ſtrong tincture of heathen philoſophy, and of this in particular. The doctrines of the immortality of the ſoul, of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, and even that of a metempſychoſis, were adopted by the learned amongſt them; tho they were rejected by thoſe who adhered to the letter of the law; for Moses had taught nothing of this kind. If any ſuch hints are contained in other books of their ſcriptures, it is impoſſible to ſay when, or by whom thoſe books were written, with the leaſt aſſurance, notwithſtanding

ſtanding all the dogmatical impertinence of ſcholars: whereas we know, that all their ſacred writings were compiled after their captivity, and that the canon of them was long in ſettling. It is poſſible, therefore, and even evident, that if they knew any thing of theſe doctrines, which had not been tranſmitted to them by MOSES, before their acquaintance with the greek philoſophy, they muſt have learned it from the nations among whom they had been mixed, and from whom the Greeks had learned the ſame, from the Chaldaeans, and even from the Egyptians, with whom they had commerce, and in whoſe country many of them found a refuge in the deſolation of their own by the Babylonians. But if they had ſo learned it, they had learned it very darkly; for there is no inſtance that ſhews they underſtood, received, or taught theſe doctrines, till long after their firſt acquaintance with the Greeks.

BUT be all this as it will, it is certain, that platoniſm was an eſtabliſhed philoſophy among the Jews before the coming of CHRIST, and that it was much more ſo among the Chriſtians afterwards. It is aſtoniſhing to conſider how fond the Chriſtians were, in the firſt ages of this church, to believe, and to make others believe, that all the myſteries of their religion had been revealed by the writings of pagan philoſophers, many centuries before they were ſo by the preaching of CHRIST and his apoſtles: as if the latter could want, or the former give any additional authority. It was to promote this opinion, that ſo many books were forged under the names of MERCURIUS TRISMEGISTUS, of HYSTASPES, of the Sybils, and perhaps of others. Theſe forgeries, indeed, were ſo groſs, that they might be well ſuſpected even at the time they were publiſhed. Their credit, however, was maintained, till they had had in ſome degree the effect they were deſigned to have. When they could have this effect in any degree no longer, they were rejected, and

even condemned. There was the leſs need of them for the abſurd purpoſes to which they were applied, becauſe the writings of PLATO *, writings indiſputably his, were public; and becauſe his works alone, wherein was mingled much of the pythagorean and other antient theology, formed an ample and ſufficient repertory of theological fables and ſymbols, and of metaphyſical myſteries. They who have employed themſelves from thoſe days to ours in raiſing ſyſtems of divinity on the goſpel, and impoſing their own inventions by pretending the authority of it, have contented themſelves accordingly with the aſſiſtance of PLATO and ARISTOTLE; of the maſter for ſublimity of matter; of the ſcholar for ſubtilty of form.

IF the abſurdity of thoſe, who have gone about to explain, to confirm, and even to improve chriſtianity by the doctrines and authority of paganiſm, be, as it is ſurely, very aſtoniſhing; we muſt confeſs, that it is ſtill more aſtoniſhing to obſerve the ſtrange conformity between platoniſm and genuine chriſtianity itſelf, ſuch as it is taught in the original goſpel. We need not ſtand to compare them here. Particular inſtances of conformity will occur often enough. In general, the platonic and chriſtian ſyſtems have a very near reſemblance, "qualis decet eſſe ſororum:" and ſeveral of the fathers, as well as modern divines, have endeavoured with all their might, by forced conſtructions, and ſometimes by no very faithful extracts, to make this reſemblance appear ſtill greater. Ridiculous endeavours, no doubt, ſince they give unbelievers occaſion to ſay, that if the doctrines are the ſame, they muſt have been deduced from the ſame principle, and to aſk what that principle was, whether reaſon or revelation? If we ſay it was reaſon; they will reply, that reaſon could not diſcover what reaſon

* "Res enim et verba ſcholam PLATONIS ſapiunt, iis exceptis, quae miſcet è "libris divinis." CASAUB. ſpeaking of one of theſe books, in his exercit.

cannot

cannot comprehend when it is diſcovered. A myſtery may be an object of faith to him, to whom it is communicated in an intelligible propoſition. But it muſt be an object of knowledge in him who communicates it, and requires an aſſent to it, on his own authority, that is, on a confidence that he knows it to be true, and that it is no myſtery to him. If we ſay it was revelation; they will reply, that PLATO then muſt have been illuminated by the holy ghoſt; that he muſt have been the precurſor of the ſaviour, as ſome platonic bigots have ventured, with a very little ſoftening to the term, to call him; and that he muſt have been a precurſor too of more importance than St. JOHN. St. JOHN inſtituted a baptiſm of repentance; and much has been ſaid by antient and modern doctors in theology to ſtate the difference between this baptiſm and that of CHRIST, baptiſm with water *, and baptiſm with the holy ghoſt and with fire †. Theſe terms, as dark as they are, ſhew however a manifeſt difference; and there can be no doubt that the baptiſm of JESUS was much more effectual than the baptiſm of JOHN, as that of JOHN was effectual to higher purpoſes than that of the Jews. But PLATO, inſtead of calling on men in general to repent, and of inſtituting one myſtical ceremony, anticipated the goſpel on ſo many principal articles of belief and practice, that, as ſome divines ſay the goſpel was a republication of the law of nature, the unbelievers will ſay it was a republication of the theology of PLATO. They will argue "à fortiori," that ſince the republication of theſe myſteries was made by divine revelation, the publication of them muſt have been of neceſſity made by the ſame means, and they will conclude, perhaps, by aſking with a ſneer, whether a man, whoſe paſſion for courteſans, and handſome boys, inſpired him to write ſo many lewd verſes, was likely to be inſpired by the holy ghoſt?

* In aquâ in poenitentiam. † In ſpiritu ſancto, et igni. MAT. cap. iii.

SUCH

Such conſiderations as theſe are more than ſufficient to explode the impertinent and profane notion, that Plato was inſpired immediately, or that he had, in any lower degree metaphyſicians can imagine, ſuch a ſhare of divine illumination as enabled him to diſcover, in part at leaſt, thoſe myſterious truths that were not to be fully revealed till the Meſſiah came. But the queſtion returns, how came he to diſcover them, even in part, near four centuries before the Meſſiah did come? or how came they to make a part of that pagan theology from which he took them? A plain anſwer may be made to theſe queſtions: and I think there is no other that can be reconciled to common ſenſe. I have hinted at it already: but it requires to be more explained. All we can know of the divine nature, of the attributes, providence, and will of God, muſt be communicated to us by his word, or collected by us from his works. The heathen philoſophers had not his word, and they corrupted all the knowledge they acquired from his works by their manner of philoſophiſing. They not only haſtened too raſhly from particular to general knowledge, and from a few imperfect obſervations of the phaenomena, to the moſt extenſive hypotheſes, but they raiſed hypotheſes independently of the obſervations they made, or might have made, and then reaſoned on theſe hypotheſes as from certain principles of knowledge: ſo that the little real knowledge they acquired "à poſteriori" was controuled by that which they fancied that they acquired "à priori," and thus the whole maſs of the firſt philoſophy was corrupted. They diſcovered, in his works, a firſt intelligent cauſe of all things, a Being of infinite power and wiſdom, whoſe providence is over all his creatures, and whoſe will, relatively to man, is manifeſted in the whole human ſyſtem. Here was abundant matter of real knowledge. Thus far the Supreme Being lets himſelf down, if I may uſe ſuch an expreſſion,

preſſion, within the verge of human comprehenſion, and of human alone, as far as we can judge of the animal world about us. Beyond this fixed point we can have no real ideas, and therefore no real knowledge. All that we may imagine we have, is, and muſt be, fantaſtical. We are no more able to acquire knowledge beyond, than other animals up to this point: and the divine nature, the manner of being, the moral attributes of God, the general ſyſtem of his providence, are as inſcrutable to man as to them. His will too, according to which they are determined by natural inſtinct, is as inſcrutable to us, as to them, beyond the bounds of natural revelation, unleſs a ſupernatural revelation communicate farther knowledge, which it did not to theſe philoſophers.

What now was their proceeding? Did they ſtop where the means of knowledge ſtop? Not at all. Where the ſyſtem ended, the hypotheſis began; and with this difference between theſe and all other hypotheſes, that thoſe which are made in phyſics are made on ſubjects on which we have much knowledge, and means in our power of acquiring more; whereas hypotheſes in theology are made on a ſubject we know little of, and have not the means of knowing more. Error in the former may be corrected by improvement of knowledge: error in the latter cannot, becauſe there can be no improvement beyond the point where ſuch hypotheſes begin. It has been obſerved in theſe eſſays, and more than once, perhaps, that there are philoſophers who boaſt much of the power which the human mind has of ranging far and wide in the regions of poſſibility, and of perceiving what may be, as well as what is, from whence they draw very fooliſh concluſions in favor of human underſtanding. Now that the mind of man has ſuch a power, we know moſt conſciouſly. But we know, or may know too as conſciouſly, that the exerciſe of this power is dangerous,

dangerous, and that he who does not uſe it under a ſtrict controul of judgment on imagination, will be ſure to render his conduct and his ſcience both fantaſtical. PLATO, like all the divines of paganiſm, was far from preſerving ſuch a controul. No man had more imagination; no man controuled it leſs.

IT would be eaſy to conceive, if we had not his works before us, that ſuch extravagant methods of philoſophiſing muſt have produced the moſt extravagant opinions: and he who reads theſe works, like a man in his ſenſes, will be tempted to think, on many occaſions, that the author was not ſo. I ſay on many occaſions; for on ſome it is certain, that he writes like a very pious and rational theiſt and moraliſt. But on the whole, his writings are pieces of patch-work, and there are few of them that do not abound in falſe ſublime and low images, in things above comprehenſion, in things below notice, in the brighteſt truths, and the fouleſt errors: and, to come to the preſent purpoſe, ſome of them abound in notions that are agreeable to the chriſtian ſyſtem, and in others that are repugnant to it; or that bearing an appearance of likeneſs, nay of ſameneſs, are much more proper to promote ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm, as in fact they did, than true religion. Theſe conſiderations, every one of which may be juſtified by the moſt famous of his dialogues, gave occaſion, perhaps, to ſome difference that aroſe in the reception of platoniſm by the chriſtian fathers. St. CHRYSOSTOM, it is ſaid, declaimed againſt it: and I remember a paſſage in TERTULLIAN *, wherein he complains, that the ſeeds of hereſies were ſcattered in PLATO's books of the republic, and in his doctrine of ideas, which he calls "haeretica idearum ſacramenta †." The greateſt fathers of the church, however, tho they differed in other things, agreed

* De anima. † —— In ideis platonicis gnoſticorum haeretica ſemina relucere.

in

in admiring PLATO, and borrowed much of their theology from him. Such were JUSTIN, ORIGEN, JEROM, AUSTIN, to quote no others, and the firſt the moſt remarkably. But how venerable ſoever their names may be, their conduct was in this reſpect extremely abſurd, injurious to the goſpel, and derogatory to the authority of it, as will appear undeniably by the reflections I had in view when I ſaid, that a plain anſwer might be made to thoſe who ſhould aſk how the myſterious truths of the goſpel could be known, without divine illumination, to PLATO.

SECTION XII.

THE reflections, I meaned, are theſe. What the Chriſtians borrowed from PLATO's works was not contained in the goſpel, or it was contained in it. If no ſuch thing was contained in it, the preſumption of thoſe was inexcuſable, who added a ſingle doctrine to the chriſtian ſyſtem, or even an explanation of a doctrine, on the faith of an heathen philoſopher, whoſe theiſm, tho purer than that of others, had ſtill a tang of ſuperſtition, and even of polytheiſm. With reſpect to God, this preſumption was a profanation: with reſpect to man, it was a fraud. The Chriſtians who were guilty of it impoſed on themſelves, or if not on themſelves, on others as far as their authority extended, the word of PLATO for the word of God. If the things they borrowed were contained in the goſpel, they had no reaſon whatever for borrowing; or this muſt have been their reaſon, they muſt have thought the authority of PLATO neceſſary to confirm that of CHRIST, or reaſon neceſſary to render complete what revelation taught imperfectly. The firſt is a blaſphemous, and the ſecond a ſilly thought. Reaſon is neceſſary and ſufficient to eſtabliſh revelation, as it has been ſhewed above.

But when the truth of a revelation is eſtabliſhed, we are to believe implicitly; the uſe of reaſon ceaſes, her interpoſition grows impertinent, and nothing can be more ſo than the affectation of antient and modern divines, to baniſh her out of her province, or to appeal to her very weakly in it; whilſt they introduce her into another, and would be thought to reſt upon her, where ſhe has nothing to do. Whenever they do this, they go out of their ſtrength: and reaſon, improperly uſed, becomes a much better weapon of offence, in the hands of their enemies, than of defence, in theirs; as the writings of many eminent divines may demonſtrate.

If reaſon now be ſo ill employed about myſteries that are propoſed, ſhe is ſtill leſs fit, and leſs likely, to propoſe them. Montagne would ſay, they are not her game. The object of reaſon is truth, intelligible, attainable truth: and if ſhe goes at any time in purſuit of it into that well where it lies concealed, as Empedocles, Democritus, and the reſt of the antient philoſophers complained ſo loudly, ſhe never plunges ſo far into the dark as to be unable to diſtinguiſh it from error. Divine myſteries ſhe receives implicitly, but ſhe advances none of her own under that title: and a reaſonable man, and a myſtic man, ſeem two diſtinct ſpecies. All myſteries, that are not communicated expreſſly by revelation, are produced by metaphyſical delirium and religious enthuſiaſm; to both of which men of the brighteſt genius have been often tranſported. Seneca declares a man, who does not riſe above humanity, contemptible *. Many have thought they did ſo, and, ſober on all other ſubjects, have been ſtark mad on theſe; for there is a madneſs "quoad hoc," if I may ſay ſo: and neither you nor I could be at a loſs to cite ſeveral, and ſome living examples of it. But there is too a degree of affectation

* O quàm contempta res eſt homo, niſi ſupra humana ſe erexerit!

ſome-

ſometimes in this apparent madneſs, employed for different purpoſes. The metaphyſical delirium may be kept up by a reputation, which ſingularity alone is often ſufficient to acquire, and much more by an opinion of making new diſcoveries in the intellectual world. This affectation, ſuſtained by his own warm imagination, and by thoſe of his egyptian and pythagorean maſters, poſſeſſed PLATO very ſtrongly, and anſwered very effectually his purpoſe in the acquiſition of fame. He knew the people with whom he had to do; he knew that no mythology was too groſs, no pretended abſtractions too whimſical for them: and nothing can ſhew ſo much either how he had turned their heads, or how eaſily heads were turned by the marvellous in thoſe days, as the general opinion that prevailed of his divine birth. APOLLO appeared to ARISTO his father, and forbid him to enjoy his wife during the ſpace of ten months; which was a very unneceſſary precaution, if the poor man had often tried and never could: and if PERICTIONE was a virgin, when the ſame god appeared to her in a viſion, and ſhe conceived. Thus PLATO was begot to be a phyſician of ſouls, as AESCULAPIUS had been to be a phyſician of bodies.

PLATO might ſafely give a looſe to all the extravagance of his imagination in ſuch an age, and be aſſured that the wildeſt hypotheſes would paſs for ſyſtems of ſublime knowledge, and that the doctrines the leaſt underſtood would be the moſt admired. He improved this advantage to the utmoſt, and it happened, as it might, without inſpiration or miracle, that in his rambling ſpeculations about the divine and ſpiritual nature, about the immortality of the ſoul, about God's diſpenſations in this life and another, and various matters relative to theſe, he blundered on ſome divine truths that were not quite beyond human apprehenſion, according to human ideas; tho they had not

been yet revealed to mankind, nor ſtripped of types and figures, thoſe ſacred hieroglyphics, wherein they lay involved. This anſwer to the queſtion, above mentioned, is plain and full; for if events, that were to come to paſs in the order of providence, were foretold ſometimes by men who neither knew any thing of this order; nor even that they propheſied when they did propheſy, as divines have ſometimes ſaid, why ſhould not ſome truths, that were to be manifeſted in after ages by divine revelation, be anticipated by human imagination? Human reaſon would have never diſcovered them, becauſe they are no more objects of intuitive, nor of demonſtrative, than they are of ſenſitive knowledge; but imagination, conceiving them poſſible, might impoſe them for true on minds wherein ſhe exerciſed the plenitude of her power. Chriſtians, therefore, might have given this anſwer, and have evaded by it the abſurdity of ſuppoſing PLATO inſpired, and the difficulty of accounting for the chriſtianity of his doctrines without this ſuppoſition.

SECTION XIII.

I HAVE inſiſted, and muſt inſiſt again a little largely, on the theology of PLATO; tho I have ſaid a great deal in a former eſſay concerning his philoſophy in general, in order to ſhew the more fully and clearly on what original authority we reſt in matters of religion, and becauſe his works have been made, after the writings of St. PAUL, a principal foundation of all that theology which has occaſioned ſo many diſputes in the world, and has rendered the chriſtian religion obnoxious to the cavils of infidels: one of which I undertake to refute by ſhewing that it is not religion, but theology, which has done all the miſchief complained of ſo loudly and ſo juſtly. Genuine chriſtianity

was

was taught by God. Theological chriſtianity is a religion that men have invented, and that has defeated the deſign by pretending the authority of the former. Human paſſions, human intereſts, human fallibility, not thoſe of particular doctors alone, but thoſe of the church oecumenically aſſembled, from the nicaean council down to that of Trent, have had their ſhare in compoſing the preſent intricate, inconſiſtent, and voluminous ſyſtem. I can eaſily believe, that ſome of theſe divines meaned to preſerve the purity of it, and to promote revealed religion. I can believe too, that ſuch philoſophers as SOCRATES and PLATO, who contributed to deſtroy, whilſt they pretended rather to reform polytheiſm and idolatry, meaned to reſtore the purity of theiſm, and to promote natural religion. But here a difference between them, which is very well founded, and worthy of obſervation, begins to ariſe. The latter could ſupport their doctrines by no authority except their own. The former had always the pretence of ſpiritual gifts to authoriſe them.

FAITH in CHRIST, the Meſſiah, is the firſt principle of chriſtianity, an article as plain as it is eſſential. But there are other articles in the goſpel, darkly revealed, becauſe doubtfully expreſſed; beſides ſeveral in the other parts of the new teſtament the ſenſe of which never has been fixed. Chriſtian divines have ſuppoſed all theſe alike eſſential. They have ſuppoſed that, as obedience is better than ſacrifice, faith is as eſſential or more eſſential than works: and every ſect has ſuppoſed the underſtanding and believing theſe ambiguous paſſages, in the ſenſe in which their teachers expound them, neceſſary to the ſalvation promiſed in the goſpel. Thus it happened formerly, and thus it happens ſtill, that the objects of faith vary in every chriſtian ſect: and as neutrality, in the civil conteſts of the athenian commonwealth, was branded with a

note

note of infamy; ſo in theſe religious conteſts, as they are falſely called, he who takes no ſide is ſtigmatiſed for an infidel by all, and he who takes any ſide is given over for an heretic to the hangman here, and to the devil hereafter, by every ſide except his own. In ſhort, it is not enough to believe like a Chriſtian, it is made neceſſary that men, women, and children ſhould decide like metaphyſicians, or believe without knowing what they believe.

If we may be allowed to think, and they who prefer the example and doctrine of Christ to thoſe of Paul will find reaſon to think, that the Meſſiah intended rather to reform, and to graft upon judaiſm, than to aboliſh it; we may think too that Socrates and Plato intended rather to reform paganiſm, and to graft ſomething leſs carnal, and more ſpiritual upon it, than by a more direct oppoſition to the rooted prejudices of their age and country to aboliſh them quite. This pious attempt coſt the maſter his life, and made the ſcholar, perhaps, not only involve his doctrines in greater obſcurity, but ſeem, at leaſt in ſeveral inſtances, favorable to the abſurdities of paganiſm. Socrates was a zealous miſſionary of morality: and the obligations of natural religion in public and private life were taught and preſſed upon men both by him and Plato, not only from motives that reaſon ſuggeſts, but by inculcating the doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul, a doctrine the moſt uſefully believed, and the moſt weakly proved, ſays Charron *; and of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, which they had learned from the Egyptians, among whom theſe doctrines had prevailed from an unknown antiquity, and not from the Jews who could not derive theſe doctrines from Moses, and who do not appear to have entertained them till they began to tag their law with the ſcraps of philoſophy.

* De la ſageſſe l. 1. c. 15.

Adora-

ADORATION of the Supreme Being, gratitude and reſignation to the order of his providence, were the great internal duties of religion, that theſe philoſophers taught: and it is eaſy to diſcern what they thought of external worſhip, by ſeveral paſſages in PLATO. In his book of laws he directs indeed, that men ſhould reſort to the public temples, deliver their victims and offerings to the prieſts, and ſacrifice and pray there only. But even in that place, where he ſeems to have ſo much regard to the uniformity of public worſhip, he hints ſufficiently in what eſteem he held it, by his invective againſt the ſuperſtition of private devotions; which, after all he ſays againſt them, were founded on the ſame principles, and performed on the ſame model as thoſe of eſtabliſhed and public worſhip. He ſpeaks moſt reaſonably, in the ſecond ALCIBIADES, of the regard God has to a pious diſpoſition of mind, and humorouſly enough of this external worſhip, as of an account, that men pretend to keep with God, as with a banker or uſurer; whereby acts of devotion performed, and benefits received, may be balanced. But the paſſage, I chooſe to cite, precedes theſe in the ſame dialogue. After ſhewing that men aſked things contrary, and even hurtful to them, SOCRATES commends the prayer of the poet who aſked JUPITER to grant his friends ſuch things as were good for them, whether they prayed that they might have them or not, and to refuſe ſuch as were hurtful, even when they deſired them. From hence he takes occaſion to commend likewiſe the cuſtom of the Lacedaemonians, who aſked for good in general, and for nothing in particular, "pulchra cum bo-"nis," in all their prayers public and private. They were not, however, he ſays, leſs happy than other people; and upon that occaſion he tells ALCIBIADES a ſtory, which he had heard from certain old men. The Athenians, being always beaten at land and at ſea by the Lacedaemonians, conſulted JUPITER

HAM-

HAMMON to know why the gods were more favorable to their enemies, who did not worſhip them with the ſame pomp and expence as the Athenians did? HAMMON anſwered, that the acclamations, that is, the prayers of the Lacedaemonians pleaſed him better than all the religious rites and ceremonies of the other Greeks.

NOT only the notions of theſe philoſophers concerning divine worſhip, but their notions concerning the firſt principle of all religion, the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, were much more conformable to right reaſon than any of thoſe which prevailed at that time. There are many ſuch ſcattered about in the writings of PLATO, which the moſt orthodox theiſt might adopt. He acknowledged one Supreme Being, eternal, ineffable, incomprehenſible, all-perfect, the ſelf-exiſtent fountain of all exiſtence, divine and human, himſelf above all eſſence. God is truth, but above all truth, intelligent as well as intelligible, but above all intelligence; good, but above all goodneſs. He is none of theſe, but the principle of them all, as the ſun is the principle of light, and as he makes all things to be ſeen without being light or ſight himſelf. In a word, PLATO acknowledged the omniſcience, the omnipreſence, the infinite power and wiſdom of God. Theſe are very elevated ſentiments, which may be collected from his writings. They are ſtrained as high as the utmoſt pitch to which we can carry our ideas, and they point ſtill higher. So they ſhould; for after all the efforts that the mind of man is capable of making, our conceptions will fall infinitely ſhort of their object, when this object is the majeſty of the all-perfect Being. Neither PLATO, nor they who received his philoſophy four or five hundred years after his time, and who were even more extravagant and leſs intelligible than he, could puſh their general and abſtract notions of this ſort too far. The intellectual proſpect is immenſe, and the intellectual

lectual ſight muſt be ſtrained, from objects clearly and diſtinctly perceived, to ſuch as are leſs ſo, and from theſe, ſtill farther; till it can be ſtrained no more, and the mind is loſt in the ſublimity of its own conceptions.

If theſe ſpeculations cannot diſcover, by infinite degrees, the whole truth, they cannot lead us into any error, and they ſerve to maintain in our minds that awful ſenſe, and that profound veneration of the Supreme Being, of the true God in the unity of his nature, which are due to him from every intelligent creature. Thus far, therefore, and in this manner, Plato was an excellent maſter of natural theology. His errors, and thoſe of all other pretenders to metaphyſical theology, are owing to ſpeculations of another kind, relative indeed to theſe, but purſued in a different ſpirit, the ſpirit of vain curioſity, and are hypothetical from the firſt for want of real ideas whereon to ſet out. In a word, they are engraftments on the religion of nature and of reaſon, which neither nature nor reaſon can admit. Our world ſeems to be, in many reſpects, the bedlam of every other ſyſtem of intelligent creatures, and with this unlucky circumſtance, that they who are moſt mad govern, in things of the greateſt importance, thoſe who are leaſt ſo: and Charron * might very well ſay, that minds thought capable of prophecy, illumination, revelation, and admiſſion into the ſecret councils of the gods, were ſuch as extaſy and enthuſiaſm tranſported, or ſleep ſet on dreaming. The obſervation may be carried down from antient to modern days, and may be verified by examples of chriſtian as well as heathen fanatics. There are, indeed, madmen little leſs ridiculous among thoſe who pretend to be metaphyſicians and theologians, great maſters of reaſon, lovers of wiſdom, inſtructors of mankind, and ſpiritual guides. It has been the pride and folly of theſe men in

* Lib. 1. cap. 6.

all ages to impoſe complete ſyſtems of knowledge on the world; whereas all human knowledge in its utmoſt extent is deficient, and a ſyſtem of this kind, that affects to be, and that appears to be complete, is therefore falſe. This folly prevailed moſt in the nonage of philoſophy; for as men have riſen in ſcience, they have ſeen their ignorance better. It continues however ſtill, in ſome degree, and appears, on ſome occaſions, but is ſo predominant on none as on ſubjects that the firſt philoſophy furniſhes, on which every dabler in theology, nay every old woman, "quaedam anicula chriſtiana," to ſpeak like TERTULLIAN, is ready to explain very particularly the divine nature and attributes, the conſtitution of the ſpiritual, and the creation and government of the corporeal world, and to ſpeak like another great doctor as well as heretic, the whole ſcheme, order, and ſtate of things *.

PLATO gave encouragement, and furniſhed matter, to this preſumption, by his engraftments on natural religion, by the extravagant notions which he propagated, and by his whole manner of philoſophiſing. His works have ſtood in the place of his imaginary ſyſtem of eternal ideas, and divines and metaphyſicians, who have thought like MALEBRANCHE, that they conſulted the Logos, and that they derived their knowledge from thoſe abſtract beings that reſide in the divine intelligence, have conſulted only PLATO, and have derived from his writings all the whimſies that compoſe their fantaſtical ſcience. They may have thought themſelves wrapped into a third heaven, as St. PAUL ſays that he, or ſomebody that he knew, was, or that they roſe in extaſy, like PLOTINUS and PORPHYRY, up to a divine union; but we may aſſure ourſelves, that they never were wrapped in any heaven but that of their own imagination, nor roſe to any divine union but that with the divine PLATO.

* CLARKE in his Eviden.

To

To collect all the abſurdities, and manifeſt inconſiſtencies and contradictions, that are to be found in his works, would be to write a treatiſe bigger, and as ſtrong at leaſt to the purpoſe as that of PLUTARCH on the repugnancies of the ſtoics. To ſeparate, from what is reaſonable and true in this philoſophy, all the logical puerilities, all the falſe ſublime, all the tedious and flimſy argumentations that prove nothing, in a word, all that is unintelligible, or that informs us not when it is underſtood, would be a work ſomething like to that which our VERULAM * wiſhed to ſee performed in one view, and MONTAIGNE † in another; and if I miſtake not, the vogue of PLATO, the particular importance of ſome ſubjects, and the general hurt he has done to ſcience by laying falſe foundations of it conſidered, this work would be more uſeful in a third view: it would ſhew us to what miſerable ſhifts the greateſt men are reduced, ſince PLATO is to be numbered among theſe, when they pretend to give complete ſyſtems of knowledge divine and human under the name of philoſophy §; when they aſſume unattainable knowledge to be attained, and that which is fantaſtical to be real. But this is a work we ſhall never ſee performed. Men, as dull or as mad as all the commentators and tranſlators of PLATO have been, are incapable of it, and men who are neither will find themſelves more agreeable employment.

THO this philoſopher was not a friend to the polytheiſm and idolatry of the heathen world, he was not an enemy to ſuperſtition. Far from going about to deſtroy it, he refined, he ſpiritualiſed it, and intrenched it more in myſtery. He made it more plauſible, and more ſecure from the attacks to which it ſtood expoſed before. He made uſe indeed, on ſome occaſi-

* Advancem. of Lear. lib. 3. † Eſſays chap. 12.
§ Philoſophia eſt divinarum et humanarum rerum ſcientia.

ons, for ornament or illuſtration, of fables taken from the current mythology, like that of love begot by PORUS on PENIA, when he was drunk in JUPITER's orchard, and the gods were met to celebrate the birth of VENUS: but the divine mythology he taught purpoſely was not ſo groſs. The gods of the heathen had been men. The ſepulchers of theſe immortals were ſhewn, and they retained in heaven the paſſions, the manners, and the habits of the earth. The celeſtial kingdom was peopled, like other countries, by colonies from abroad, by naturaliſations of foreigners, and by the generations of thoſe who had been there ſo long, that they ſeemed the aborigines of the country. The gods of PLATO were of another ſort. They were generated indeed, for he ſuppoſed too a production and propagation of divinities; but the image of this generation was changed, and gods were ſaid to be produced by emanation or proceſſion; emanations from the firſt divine eſſence, like beams from the ſun, proceſſions, or rather extenſions of the ſupreme and ſimple ſubſtance *, for thus they have been explained by the platonics. In ſome ſuch incomprehenſible, if not ineffable manner, (for what is ineffable to one of theſe philoſophers?) ſouls, angels, and daemons were produced; by the ſuppoſed exiſtence of the two laſt of which, viſions and dreams, and every art of divination, and every ſuperſtition of magic, was upheld.

THIS little that I have ſaid, may ſtand as a general ſpecimen of the platonic theology in this place; for in another, I ſhall give ſome that will be more particular. No man ever dreamed ſo wildly as this author writ—— "velut aegri ſomnia, vanae "finguntur ſpecies." But as he had no divine miſſion nor authority to claim, all this reſted on his own authority: he was to prove it as he could, and every man was at liberty to receive

* Profuſio quaedam et extenſio ſummae et ſimplicis ſubſtantiae.

or

or reject all or any of these doctrines as he found the proof. Thus they remained purely hypothetical, nor could be made dogmatical, till christian divines made them so, by adopting them as parts of divine revelation. Then, indeed, they became dogmas to Christians: and before that time, they were not such to many of the heathens. They could not be such to PLATO himself, whatever they were to some of his disciples. He, who published them, knew that he invented them, or that he borrowed them from those that did invent them, and that neither he nor they were led to them by any chain of knowledge. Neither he nor they could be the bubbles of these doctrines; tho they, who received them for true theology, were so. It is not he who makes, but he who swallows, the wine that gets drunk. But as soon as Christians found some, and thought they found others of these doctrines in the gospel, the difference I mentioned between the authority of these divines, and that of the divines of paganism was complete. The authority of revelation confirming that of PLATO, propositions that were dubious to the one became certain to the others, and philosophical conjectures became articles of faith: just as it happened afterwards, when the authority of ARISTOTLE was added to both, and new doctrines were devised, by metaphysical explanations and extensions, under pretence of defending the former.

NOTHING less than this could have established and continued the theology of PLATO. In his days, and long after them, philosophy was for the most part very hypothetical. Physics were so. What wonder if metaphysics were more, nay wholly so? When PLATO had brought these, and ARISTOTLE logic, into repute, one of them made the material world metaphysically, the other logically, and both very absurdly. But when they set themselves, and PLATO especially,

to

to raiſe an immaterial intellectual world, metaphyſical and logical architecture were moſt properly employed. They could employ no other: they knew little, imagined much, built beyond nature; and terms and phraſes, which ſupported their ſchemes, covered equally the deficiency and the futility of their matter, not unlike to thoſe columns and entablatures of painted paſtboard that imitate the ſolidity of marble and deceive the eye. This was the leaſt laborious, the ſhorteſt and ſureſt way to fame: and whilſt men neglected the analyſe of ideas, and attended to the forms of argumentation, it was no hard matter to throw words into ſuch forms as were ſufficient to keep up diſpute in the defence of any doctrines. An hypotheſis, plauſible to the reaſon, or to the prejudices, or to the predominant affections and paſſions of men, formed a ſect; and as ſoon as a ſect was formed, the hypotheſis became a demonſtrated ſyſtem, which the honor of the ſect was concerned to maintain. There were many ſuch among the Greeks, and they were all defended and attacked with equal obſtinacy, till time and conteſts wore them out. If platoniſm was not better founded in reaſon and knowledge than others, it was kept up long with greater art, and had greater good fortune afterwards. PLATO gave occaſion to both. To the firſt directly, and by choice. To the laſt indirectly, and by chance. His immediate ſucceſſors, SPEUSIPPUS, XENOCRATES, POLEMO, CRATES, CRANTOR, had acquired no great fame, nor had any great ſucceſs. The portic and the gardens of EPICURUS rivalled the academy, in oppoſing dogma to dogma. ARCESILAUS, therefore, and CARNEADES changed the conduct of this philoſophical war. By affirming nothing, they left their adverſaries nothing to attack; and by aſſuming, in conſequence, the right of diſputing againſt every thing, they were at liberty to take their advantage wherever they found it. The example of their founder, and of his maſter, ſuggeſted this expedient to them, and counte-

countenanced them in the uſe of it. They became terrible to the ſtoicians, and to the epicureans, and to all the dogmatiſts.

As theſe men pretended to revive the firſt academy by reverting to ſcepticiſm, tho they were called authors of a ſecond and a third, aud therefore academic philoſophers, ſo there were others who, under pretence of adhering to the firſt academy, profeſſed themſelves dogmatiſts, and affected to be named platonicians. Some of theſe men indeed became peripatetics, or ſlided from platoniſm into ſtoiciſm, like the philoſopher ANTIOCHUS whom TULLY mentions*; whilſt the ſuſpenſion of aſſent was ſtill maintained, as the true principle of the academy old and new, by CLITOMACHUS, PHILO, and TULLY. VARRO ſays, in the academics, there was no difference between the peripatetics, certain dogmatiſts no doubt, and the old academy†. TULLY ſays, that the academy they called the new, appeared to him to be the ſame as the old §. Thus the matter ſtood in Greece and at Rome. But the platoniſm that prevailed in Aſia and Egypt, and was taught in the famous ſchool of Alexandria, was unqueſtionably dogmatical in every point. If the philoſophers in thoſe countries did not find it, they made it ſuch. It could not otherwiſe have ſuited the characters, nor have anſwered the purpoſes of Jews, of Chriſtians, and of thoſe who oppoſed chriſtianity: by all of whom it was, in ſome degree, and in a different manner, adopted, according to the method of the eclectic ſect that POTAMO of Alexandria founded. The object of this ſect was very ſpecious. Theſe philoſophers were to ſelect the beſt and trueſt placits from all others. But we may conclude that they ſelected, conformably to the human character, ſuch as agreed beſt with their own

* In academ.

† Nihil enim inter peripateticos, et illam veterem academiam, differebat.

§ Hanc academiam novam appellabant, quae mihi vetus videtur.

opinions,

opinions, according to the account DIOGENES LAERTIUS* gives of POTAMO, that he choſe thoſe things that pleaſed him moſt. Thus the Jews took ſome dogmas, the Chriſtians more, and the Pagans moſt of all, from PLATO's philoſophy; which became accidentally of greater extent, duration, and importance than the author had any reaſon to expect.

THERE are many things unintelligible in the antient philoſophers, many inconſiſtent and contradictory, even among thoſe who wrote with the greateſt clearneſs and preciſion; for I except neither CICERO nor SENECA. It would be time well ſaved to neglect the firſt, and nothing can be more ridiculous than the pains that learned men take to diſguiſe or reconcile the others, inſtead of owning them to be, what after all their pains they are forced to leave them, inconſiſtencies and contradictions. But PLATO has this peculiar advantage over all the philoſophers of any name. He has puzzled mankind, not only by particular paſſages in his writings, but about his own general character as an author. The dogmatiſts, and the ſceptics, for ſuch in truth the academicians were, have claimed him: and it is at this hour a problematical point at leaſt, whether this great philoſopher and divine gave a full aſſent to the truth of his own doctrines. To all of them, to ſome of the principal, he could not. They were the fruits of his own and of other men's invention; and he muſt have been conſcious that they were ſo, as I obſerved above.

SECTION XIV.

IT is in itſelf of little moment in what ſpirit, and on what motive, PLATO writ, who or what he was. The weight of

* In praefat.

reaſon,

reaſon, and not the authority of an author, ſhould decide our opinions *: and this philoſopher himſelf ſpeaks very ſtrongly to this purpoſe, in many places, in the Gorgias particularly. If a doctrine, which PLATO taught, be ſupported by reaſon or revelation, we ought to receive it with that aſſent which is due to truth †; tho he were a ſceptic under the maſk of a dogmatiſt. If any of his doctrines are ſupported neither by reaſon nor revelation, we ought to reject them; tho he were a dogmatiſt under the maſk of a ſceptic. This is evident: and yet chriſtian divines have been in all ages as zealous to make him paſs for a dogmatiſt, as if nothing more was neceſſary to eſtabliſh the truth of a doctrine than to be aſſured that he thought it true, and taught it as ſuch. In the mean time, they did not enough conſider that they made a fool or a knave of their favorite philoſopher. Wrong methods of inquiring after truth and knowledge, and frequent contentions about them, ended in a diſpute at laſt, not whether there was any ſuch thing as truth, but whether there was any ſuch thing as knowledge. From hence aroſe dogmatiſts, acataleptics, and ſceptics §. If PLATO was one of the former, who boaſted that they had found the truth, and if there can be on every ſubject one opinion alone true, how came he to have different opinions on the ſame ſubject, not tranſiently nor inadvertently mentioned, but formally delivered and maintained? In the other two characters, if he believed all things to be abſolutely incomprehenſible, or if he reſtrained his aſſent becauſe, tho he did not deny that truth might be found, he did not deter-

* Non tam auctores —— quàm rationis momenta quaerenda ſunt. CIC. de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

† —— Alii alios ſe convincere arbitrantur, cum —— multos et celebres teſtes produxerint —— verum haec probationis ratio nullius eſt momenti ad veritatem, &c.

§ Ex philoſophis alii ſe verum adinveniſſe jactant, et dogmatici appellantur. Alii pronunciant, verum nec inveniri nec percipi poſſe, et cataleptici dicuntur.—— Alii, aſſenſum ſuſtinentes, neque ſtatuunt verum inventum eſſe, neque inveniri poſſe negant, et dicuntur ſceptici, conſideratores, et ephectici, cohibitores aſſenſûs.

mine neither that it had been found; in theſe two characters, I ſay, he might very fairly, tho not very uſefully, deliver contrary opinions, and defend or oppoſe any of them hypothetically. But neither the ſuppoſition of two doctrines, nor of two ſenſes, nor of two characters, in PLATO, that ſtale artifice by which critics make authors ſay or not ſay whatever they pleaſe, will excuſe him as a dogmatiſt, if he was one, and a dogmatiſt too who treated the moſt important points of knowledge, ſince the being of a God, the worſhip of him, the firſt principles of things, and the conduct of providence, were ſome of the objects of it.

MY way of thinking, which I have found no where the leaſt reaſon to alter, would hinder me from any farther conſideration of PLATO in this reſpect, if it was not worth our while to conſider how feebly the authorities we value the moſt are often founded. The fathers of the chriſtian church have maintained that PLATO was a dogmatiſt, and well they might; ſince NUMENIUS, a pythagorean philoſopher, aſſerted the ſame of PYRRHO, and ſince SEXTUS EMPIRICUS ſays *, that ARCESILAUS was ſuſpected to be another. With the paradox concerning PYRRHO I have nothing to do; but ſurely it is as little poſſible to imagine what grounds SEXTUS, who lived four hundred years after ARCESILAUS, or St. AUSTIN, who lived above a century later, or indeed any man of his own age, country or ſchool, could have to make a dogmatiſt of one who diſclaimed all knowledge like him, even that which SOCRATES excepted, the knowledge of his ignorance, as it is to imagine what NUMENIUS meaned when he imputed dogmatiſm to PYRRHO. A man, who made it the buſineſs of his life, and the principle of his profeſſion, to diſpute againſt every propoſition that could be advanced, was not ſurely a ſceptic in ap-

* Lib. 1. cap. 31.

pearance

pearance alone, " primâ fronte," as SEXTUS ſays, but inwardly and in very good earneſt. Notwithſtanding this, St. AUSTIN * took the fact for granted, and wrought up in his warm imagination a very ſubtile and pious ſcheme of policy, which is almoſt too fanciful for the ſaint, and which no man, leſs viſionary than he, can believe that the philoſopher ever entertained. Some ſuch there have been, however, and a reverend father † of the oratory in France has treated this whimſy very ſeriouſly.

THE ſtoicians then, according to St. AUSTIN, placing the chief happineſs of man in virtue, that is, in the mind, the epicureans placing it in volupty, that is, in the body, and the platoniſts placing it in the enjoyment of God, the latter judged very wiſely, that it was proper to prepare the way to truth by deſtroying, in the firſt place, the errors of thoſe ſects. They ſaw that their own ſublime doctrine would fall into contempt, if they publiſhed it among men immerſed in ſenſe, like the epicureans, or even among the ſtoicians, who gave the preference indeed to virtue, but who could not raiſe their conceptions up to ſomething divine and immaterial, to ſomething above mind as above body, to ſomething knowable by pure intellect, and yet far ſuperior to it, that is, up to God. They knew that they ſhould not be heard, if they went about to teach men who believed atoms, or the four elements, to be the firſt principles of all things, that all things proceeded from an immaterial wiſdom §. They conſidered farther, that the epicureans being perſuaded their ſenſes never deceived them, and the ſtoicians believing, like the ariſtotelians, that altho their

* Ep. ad Diosc. ep. 118. ed. bened.

† THOMASSIN de la maniere d'etudier la philoſ.

§ N. B. This is ſaid purely to do honor to PLATO, for he was abſurd enough to make matter and ideas firſt principles jointly with God.

ſenſes might ſometimes deceive them, yet they could not acquire, without the aſſiſtance of their ſenſes, any knowledge of the truth of things, it would be to little purpoſe to tell either the one or the other that the only Being, which has a real exiſtence, cannot be repreſented to the mind by any of the images of ſenſe, and that this immutable Being is that alone which we conceive truly; becauſe pure intellect, which alone perceives the truth of things, alone perceives the exiſtence of this Being.

Now ſince ARCESILAUS could not flatter himſelf that theſe ſublime doctrines would be received, againſt the philoſophical prejudices that prevailed in his time, it behoved him to look forward, and to convey the pure ſtreams that flowed from the ſprings PLATO had opened, as St. AUSTIN * expreſſes himſelf in one of his letters, thro a channel ſhaded and covered by brambles and thorns, leſt they ſhould be expoſed to beaſts that would render them foul and muddy. Nothing leſs than a ſubmiſſive faith, ſuch a faith as he mentions in his letter to CONSENTIUS †, a faith that muſt precede reaſon in order to purify the heart, and to prepare the mind to comprehend what it ought to admit implicitly at firſt, could impoſe ſuch doctrines, and nothing leſs than the authority of one who was God and man could impoſe ſuch a faith. Now the platonicians could produce no authority of this kind, nor ſhew a God abaſed and humbled before the coming of CHRIST. They were in the right, therefore, to conceal their doctrines, till this great event happened. But as ſoon as it happened, they opened the whole ſecret of their theology and metaphyſics. Some of them, indeed, were corrupted by the damnable curioſity of magic. But many of them acknowledged JESUS to be that God and man, in whom immutable wiſdom and truth were incarnated, and by whoſe mouth the eternal eſſence had ſpoken to mankind.

* To HERMOG. ep. 1. ed. benedic. † Ep. 120. ed. benedic.

SUCH

Such are the notions that St. Austin endeavours to give in ſome of his epiſtles, and in his books againſt the academics, to eſtabliſh the opinion that Plato was a dogmatiſt, and to account for the conduct of his ſceptical followers. But this ingenious ſcheme hangs ill together. What has been ſaid above, concerning the motives that Arcesilaus had to make a public profeſſion of ſcepticiſm, ſeems much more probable than what our african biſhop advances. Plato had rivals and enemies among the philoſophers, Aristippus and Diogenes the cynic, for inſtance, who embarraſſed him more than once. But in his time, and for ſome time after him, no ſchool grew up that could vie with his. Aristotle, who founded one that became famous, heard Plato twenty years, that is, till Plato died. Epicurus did not come to Athens till Xenocrates was at the head of the academy, nor begin to teach ſo ſoon; and Zeno and Arcesilaus were ſcholars of Polemo at the ſame time. Thus far the courſe of the academy glided ſmoothly on. But here the conteſts began; and the ſubtilties of the portic were the more to be feared by Arcesilaus, becauſe Zeno, who ſet up this rival ſchool, had been received in the academy, and had learned, like a ſpy, where and how it might be attacked with moſt advantage. Other dogmatic ſects grew up and ſtrengthened at the ſame time: and the ſureſt way to divert their attacks, was to attack them all on this one principle eſtabliſhed by Socrates, "nihil ſciri, nihil percipi poſſe." If Arcesilaus had gone about to defend his maſter's doctrines, which were not eaſy to be defended, ſurrounded as he was by enemies, he muſt have been beat on every ſide; whereas by renouncing all pretenſions to knowledge, he had nothing to defend, had no recrimination to fear, and might attack with his whole force. We may add, perhaps, a motive of pique to this of policy; for beſides that Arcesilaus was piqued perſonally

ſonally by ZENO, who employed the arms he had acquired in the academy againſt that ſchool, nothing could be more provoking than the arrogance wherewith the ſtoics exacted the ſame aſſent to their moſt extravagant paradoxes, as the mind gives to truths that are objects even of intuitive knowledge. Thus we may eaſily conceive, that it happened in philoſophy on this occaſion, as it has happened in religion on many. Exceſs on one ſide produced exceſs on the other. So ſabellianiſm gave occaſion to arianiſm, and the foppery of Rome to the ruſticity of Geneva. So the dogmatical preſumption of ZENO, who affirmed the world to be a rational animal, as confidently as he affirmed it to be light at noon *, puſhed ARCESILAUS to deny every kind and degree of knowledge.

BUT it is not enough to have ſhewn that this account is probable, unleſs a ſhort and obvious reflection be added to ſhew, that it is impoſſible the motives St. AUSTIN aſſigns to the conduct of ARCESILAUS and the academics ſhould be true. Now, I aſk, whether theſe philoſophers could mean to conceal the doctrines of PLATO, which had been publicly taught by more of his ſucceſſors than St. AUSTIN mentions, and which were contained in his writings? They might abandon the defence of theſe doctrines, and ſhew little regard to them, but they could not mean to conceal them, and reſerve them for a more proper conjuncture, as St. AUSTIN aſſerts. They might do ſo the rather, and with a due regard to the honor of their founder, ſince by abandoning theſe they did not abandon him. He had jumbled two oppoſite characters moſt prepoſterouſly together. He was ſometimes apparently a dogmatiſt, and made even SOCRATES talk in that ſtyle. But ſtill the known ſceptical character of the maſter was the real character of the ſcho-

* —Nec magis apparebit nunc lucere, quoniam ſtoicus, quàm hunc mundum eſſe ſapientem. Acad.

lar.

lar. This character therefore ARCESILAUS and CARNEADES aſſumed, as ſoon as it was for the honor and intereſt of their ſchool to abandon the other, and deemed themſelves, no doubt, more truly, platonicians, than any of thoſe who had been at the head of the academy before them. I confound ARCESILAUS and CARNEADES together, as TULLY does: for tho there might be ſome difference, which I will not have the trouble of conſidering, between the notions CARNEADES had, and thoſe of ARCESILAUS, concerning the cauſes of incomprehenſibility; yet they both maintained, with equal zeal, and CARNEADES, it is ſaid, with greater force of argument, that we are unable to arrive at the truth of things by ſenſe or by reaſon.

IF SOCRATES was not ſo great a genius, even with the help of his daemon, as he has been repreſented, he was certainly ſomething better than a genius. He was a very good man: and I find in myſelf an unwillingneſs to believe him abſolutely a ſceptic, both on this account, and on account of that predilection, which you know that another good man, our friend, the biſhop of Cloyne, has for him. That he might be ſuch, as to phyſics and all the ſciences which the Greeks called mathematics, or diſciplines *, I can eaſily believe. XENOPHON gave the lie to PLATO, and all thoſe who pretended that he taught them; and SOCRATES himſelf complained bitterly, when he heard the Lyſis read †, of PLATO's miſrepreſentations. No philoſopher could be ſo eaſily, nor ſo ſafely, miſrepreſented. He preached, but he did not write: and we know nothing more of his philoſophy than the ſcraps his auditors retained, ſome of which XENOPHON has given us more truly, and PLATO more copiouſly. He picked up ſcholars occaſionally in the ſtreets and public places of Athens, and was a miſſionary of virtue to them all, from ALCIBIADES down to the meaneſt citizen. He

* AUL. GELLIUS. † DIOG. LAERTIUS.

rather

rather refuted the ſophiſts, than labored to inſtruct directly: and this he did by a perpetual diſſimulation of his own opinions, and an ironical deference to theirs; which manner might give an air of ſcepticiſm to all he ſaid, even on moral ſubjects. In ſhort, if I cannot believe him a dogmatiſt, I will not believe him an abſolute ſceptic.

Socrates may be compared to the Cimmerians, who were deprived of the light of the ſun, but were not in utter darkneſs. He founded his ethics on probability, if you pleaſe; but it was on ſuch a probability, as Tully explains in his reply to Lucullus; ſuch a probability, as a wiſe man muſt reſt upon, or all the rules of life will be ſubverted. If this was ſo, the difference between Socrates, and Arcesilaus, and Carneades was very great. They did not admit, at leaſt the former did not, the faint light of probability, and could be ſcarce diſtinguiſhed from thoſe who profeſſed pyrrhoniſm: tho St. Austin thought fit to employ even the former, very piouſly, in preparing the way for the reception of the goſpel; for which he had no authority whatever, except that of his own wild imagination. For the dogmatiſm of Socrates and of Plato, and for a diſtinction between the old and new academy, he had ſome indeed. Cicero introduces Lucullus, in the academical queſtions, comparing Arcesilaus to Tiberius Gracchus, and complaining, that as one of theſe diſturbed the peace of an excellent commonwealth, ſo the other overturned philoſophy, when it was brought to perfection. But Tully decides the controverſy, without regard to probable arguments, by an appeal to fact. He had a bigot veneration for Plato. He had ſtudied his works ſo long, and had familiariſed himſelf with them ſo much, that he ſeemed to have lived with this philoſopher, " ut penè cum his vixiſſe videar;" as he ſays of himſelf. He knew Plato better than St. Austin, and he aſ-

ſerted,

ſerted, that the new academy was the ſame as the old *, if PLATO, who founded it, was to be reckoned of the old, in whoſe works nothing was affirmed, who diſputed for and againſt many things, inquired about all, and advanced none as certain †.

IF PLATO muſt be reckoned, notwithſtanding this, a dogmatiſt, it will be equally impoſſible to juſtify the regard, that the chriſtian fathers, moſt of them at leaſt, paid to him themſelves, and that they encouraged others to pay, nor the uſe that they made of his writings. They who called him the homerical philoſopher thought more juſtly of him, than they who called him the attic MOSES, or than they who ſtill more profanely put him and PLOTINUS, and even JESUS CHRIST, in matters of doctrine, on a level §. By doing this they defiled chriſtianity with many ſuperſtitious notions, and mixed their theology up with much of that imaginary ſcience about divine, angelical, and human natures, which was derived from Egypt and the Eaſt, thro PYTHAGORAS and PLATO chiefly, to the Greeks and the Romans, and from theſe two philoſophers, thro the ſchool of Alexandria more than any other way; for dogmatical platoniſm, which included both, floriſhed in that ſchool more than it had ever done in the academy, to the whole chriſtian world.

BUT farther, and to ſet this proceeding off in all the colors it deſerves, are we ſure that PLATO, tho a dogmatiſt, was much in earneſt on every point of theology which the fathers of the church took from him, and incorporated into the chri-

* Academiam novam, quae mihi vetus videtur.

† Nihil affirmatur—in utramque partem multa diſſeruntur, de omnibus quaeritur, nihil certi dicitur.

§ Vid. Ep. NEBRIDII ad AUGUS.

ſtian ſyſtem, as explanatory of it, or additional to it? He might not be ſo moſt certainly. Des Cartes was dogmatiſt enough in all conſcience; and yet, without derogating from this part of his character, we may believe that he was not very ſerious when he revived the whimſical notion of Gomez Pereyra, that beaſts are automates, or pieces of clock work, nor, perhaps, when he maintained the plenum. He had his particular reaſons of prudence, to ſhelter himſelf from ſome attacks, that he might apprehend, and of conſiſtency to make the hypothetical parts of his philoſophy hang the better together, as well as of conformity to certain received opinions. Plato might have reaſons of the ſame, or of other kinds. It would not be hard to point out ſome ſuch: and if he had no other, philoſophical obſervation alone, and the deſire of acquiring fame by the publication of a new and more ſublime ſyſtem, for ſo all things that are unintelligible in metaphyſical theology are called, would have determined him to ranſack antient legends, as well as his own imagination, for every thing that might ſerve to this purpoſe. We may believe this the more eaſily, ſince there runs thro all his works a tinſelled embroidery of this kind, on a ground of low conceits and tedious irony:

" Purpureus, latè qui ſplendeat, unus, et alter
" Adſuitur pannus."

Now if Plato may be juſtly ſuſpected of ſuch a proceeding, how ridiculous, as well as abſurd and profane, ought we to eſteem that of the fathers of the church? If the doctrines of Plato are conformable to the goſpel, which I think they are not exactly in any one inſtance, except in ſome of the moral doctrines, it is abſurd: if they are different, or more extenſive in any reſpect, it is profane to make them a ſupplemental code to the evangelical ſyſtem of faith. But if he publiſhed things that were neither dictated to him by his reaſon, nor even believed

lieved by him, whatever theſe things were, and how true ſoever they might appear on ſome other authority, it was ſovereignly ridiculous to accept them in any degree for ſuch on his. Of all this abſurdity, profaneneſs, and ridicule, they who built up chriſtian theology were guilty. Inſtead of commenting platoniſm by chriſtianity, they commented chriſtianity by platoniſm. Inſtead of applying revelation to explain, and the authority of the revealer to confirm, what they thought to be true in his writings, they applied platonic philoſophy to introduce and explain chriſtian, and the authority of PLATO to confirm what they received for true on the authority of CHRIST. They added the epiſtles to the goſpels, the doctrines of PAUL to thoſe of CHRIST; and to all theſe, the reſveries of heathen philoſophy, rabinical extravagance, and chriſtian enthuſiaſm, till the apocalypſe became a part of our holy ſcriptures, and the athanaſian creed a ſummary of our faith.

SECTION XV.

I DO not expect, on this occaſion, from you the anſwer I ſhould be ſure to have from perſons more orthodox, than I know you to be, in the faith of the pretended catholic church. Such perſons would inſiſt on the authority of the church, by which all this heathen lore has been ſanctified, and ground this authority on paſſages of the ſcriptures, as they ground the authority of the ſcriptures on that of the church. This circular proof would deſerve no other anſwer than that of ſilent contempt. CLEMENT of Alexandria opens another way, to juſtify himſelf, and other fathers, for adopting ſo much heathen theology into chriſtianity. He ſuppoſes every ſyſtem of grecian and barbarian philoſophy to have been a branch of the eternal truth *, and

* —Aeternae veritatis avulſam quandam particulam. Strom. lib. 1.

all theſe branches to have been united in the chriſtian ſyſtem, like the trunk of the tree of all divine truth. Thus the doctrines of heathen theology, that were taught by PLATO and PYTHAGORAS, and derived from Egypt and the Eaſt, are not ſanctified by a ſort of retro-active power, but are made divine by their original. If now by theſe terms we do not underſtand, that the human mind riſes up to the ſupreme mind, is united with it, and contemplates the ideas that are in it; if we do not underſtand, that the intellect of man is a part of the intellect of God, as the ſoul of man was thought to be a part of the deity, or of the ſoul of the univerſe; in ſhort, if we do not underſtand them according to any of thoſe myſtical, metaphyſical notions, that platoniſm propagated, and that CLEMENT was very likely to intend, they are capable of receiving a very true ſenſe. There are, no doubt, in theology ſome truths that human reaſon, the gift of God, and in this ſenſe alone divine, is ſufficient to demonſtrate, according to thoſe criterions of human knowledge, the things that are, and that we know to be as the author of all nature ordained that they ſhould appear to creatures in our rank of being. Several ſuch truths the pagan philoſophers diſcovered. But then they blended them with monſtrous errors, derived from various extremes, by planning the divine order and oeconomy on the human, or by neglecting the phaenomena of nature, or by making extravagant hypotheſes to account for them. They diſcovered the unity of the godhead, and they ſaw that worſhip is due from the creature to the creator. But then they ran into ditheiſm, and gave up the unity, that they might ſave the goodneſs of the Supreme Being, which they imagined very falſely to be, as atheiſts objected that it was, inconſiſtent with the phaenomena. They ran farther into polytheiſm, that they might provide a multitude of agents or miniſters to execute the will of God, and to govern under him, or to be mediators and interceſſors with him in behalf of mankind.

kind. As they took notions of mediation and interceſſion, ſo they took others of attonement and expiation, from the characters of men and of governments. Hence the offerings and ſacrifices, ſanguinary ſacrifices, human ſacrifices, ſuch as the Carthaginians, our Druids, the Mexicans, and other barbarous people have inſtituted; from which examples, of the utmoſt depravation of human reaſon, that ignorance, ſuperſtition, and habits of cruelty can beget, divines would ſometimes prove that ſuch ſacrifices, and the appeaſing of God by blood *, are agreeable to the natural reaſon of mankind.

It muſt be confeſſed, however, that even in theſe days, men, whoſe natural reaſon was not thus depraved, ſaw by the light of reaſon alone how abominable ſuch rites as theſe were, and little by little, as their reaſon improved, how abſurd all their other rites, and almoſt all their theological opinions were †. Polytheiſm was mitigated; idolatry was in good meaſure diſtinguiſhed away, among the philoſophers at leaſt. Oracles and the arts of divination grew into contempt: and if hea-

* Vid. Thomassin. maniere d'etudier la philoſoph. &c.

† It may be worth while to obſerve here what is ſaid by a very great and worthy man, in a book writ on the principles of Hutchinson, to ſhew that chriſtianity is indeed very near as old as the creation. He admits, that this belief is of all others the moſt unreaſonable, except as it is explained in the original. What now is the original, by the explanation of which this belief becomes reaſonable? It was the decree of God, that a ſaviour ſhould die to atone by his blood for the ſins of men. It was therefore his command, that to keep this revelation in mind, the future ſacrifice of the ſaviour ſhould be emblematically and prophetically repreſented by ſhedding the blood of beaſts in ſacrifices, accompanied with many typical and emblematical circumſtances. No other invention could be ſo likely to preſerve, and perpetuate, the knowledge and belief of a revelation ſo neceſſary to mankind. Strange abſurdities! the bloody ſacrifice to be made ſo many thouſand years afterwards was that of the ſon of God, of the very God, and the emblematical inſtitution continued among men, who ſoon forgot that it was typical and emblematical only. Thus it ſerved to no other purpoſe, than to lead men into an opinion, that the deity was implacable, and ſins unforgiveable, unleſs he was appeaſed, and they were atoned for by the ſhedding of blood.

theniſm

theniſm was kept up by men above the vulgar, it ſeemed to be ſo only by the prieſts for lucre, and by others for fear of having no religion at all. Thus the way was prepared by reaſon for revelation, in the countries where chriſtianity firſt appeared, and which were enlightened by philoſophy. Philoſophy had begun to ſpiritualiſe religion, by exploding many of the groſs, the carnal conceptions of heathen theology, and by ſubſtituting an inward devotion, purity of heart, and a pious diſpoſition of mind, to the outward pomp and ceremony of worſhip. That this repreſentation is true, the works of PLATO alone would be ſufficient to prove; altho EUSEBIUS * was deſirous to make it believed, that no reformation had been made even in the opinions of philoſophers, before chriſtianity: but that, being then grown aſhamed of their polytheiſm and idolatry, they endeavoured to conceal them under the pretence and diſguiſe of allegory. In all caſes, when chriſtianity was once eſtabliſhed, the means of carrying this reformation of opinions to perfection were in the hands of chriſtian philoſophers and divines. It might have been expected too that revelation would unite, in one uniform ſyſtem of theology, all the converted Pagans, whom reaſon had not been able to reconcile; ſince they had now, in the word of God, a ſure criterion, by which to try the truth of their opinions.

THE very contrary happened. They differed as much as ever, and with uncharitableneſs and hatred that had been unknown to them before their converſion. Whilſt they were Pagans, they diſputed without quarrelling, and even embraced oppoſite ſects without becoming enemies. We ſee the ſtoic, the epicurean, and the academic meeting amicably together in TULLY'S works, which repreſent the manners of the age. They endeavour to refute one another; but they live in the ut-

* Praep. Evangel.

moſt

moſt intimacy of friendſhip: and if CARNEADES was exaſperated againſt the ſtoics, on account of their dogmatical, and, as we may venture to pronounce, their trifling but aſſuming airs, neither TULLY nor even COTTA were ſo *. Nay the former inclined, as much as an academic could incline, to ſtoiciſm: and SENECA, who was profeſſedly of this ſect, and he, ſpeak often with the greateſt regard of EPICURUS, and with the greateſt tenderneſs of their epicurean friends.

How it came to paſs that men, who had embraced oppoſite opinions without acrimony, whilſt they were heathens, became inveterate enemies for this very reaſon, when they were Chriſtians, or how they came to be more divided than ever, even when they had one common rule of faith and doctrine which they all acknowledged alike, is not very hard to conceive. Whilſt they were merely philoſophers, they were attached to ſome ſect or other, not only by the illuſions of their own imaginations, by their affections and paſſions, by ambition and private intereſt, but by prejudices and habits contracted early, and ſometimes before they were able to judge for themſelves. To this ſect, whichever it was, they adhered: and that which we may obſerve frequently in the political ſtruggles of our miſerable parties, happened, no doubt, in thoſe theological contentions †. A falſe point of honor prevailed ſometimes over the love of truth; it determined the will even againſt the judgment: and men choſe rather to err with thoſe with whom they had long erred, than go right in new company, or alone.

* —— Contra quorum diſciplinam ingenium ejus, CARNEADIS, exarſerat. Tuſc. diſp. l. 5.

† —— Caeteri primum antè tenentur adſtricti, quàm, quid eſſet optimum, judicare potuerunt. —— infirmiſſimo tempore aetatis, aut obſecuti amico cuidam, aut unâ alicujus, quem primum audierunt, oratione capti, de rebus incognitis judicant, et ad quamcunque ſunt diſciplinam quaſi tempeſtate delati, ad eam tanquam ad ſaxum adhaereſcunt. Acad. quaeſt.

But

But ſtill, as they were mere philoſophers, and had nothing but reaſon, their own or that of their party, to oppoſe to reaſon in every inſtance in which they differed, and as the particular opinions of no one ſect intereſted the whole body of philoſophers, the ſtate or the church in any country, theſe men might differ, before their converſion to chriſtianity, without thoſe incentives to uncharitableneſs and hatred, which acted ſo powerfully on the malignity of their hearts afterwards. As ſoon as this malignity could exert itſelf, under the ſpecious pretence of zeal for the honor of God and for the purity of the faith, it broke out with violence. Every ſide aſſumed that the word of God ſpoke in favor of them, that the ſalvation of ſouls depended on believing as they believed, and that all thoſe who diſſented from them were guilty of hereſy; for this word grew ſoon into faſhion, and from having, as I believe, a very innocent ſignification at firſt, it came, like the word tyrant, and ſome others, to convey a very odious idea at laſt. Heretics then were enemies to God, and rebels to his law. They were to be treated as ſuch by the orthodox: and hereſy and orthodoxy being determined by the ſtrength and weakneſs of parties, alternate, and therefore conſtant, perſecution was eſtabliſhed in the church of CHRIST.

SECTION XVI.

IF we inquire after the cauſes of that ſtrange multiplication of ſects, which have grown up from the apoſtolical age to this, among Chriſtians, it ſeems to me that they are to be found in the metaphyſical madneſs of philoſophers mixing with the enthuſiaſm of the firſt Chriſtians, in the cabaliſtical practice of giving different ſenſes to the ſame paſſages of holy writ, in the uncertainty of tradition, and in the uſe that a diſtinct order of men has

has made, in every chriſtian ſtate, of theſe and other circumſtances to acquire dominion over private conſciences.

MEN run naturally from extreme to extreme. The farther they have gone into one, the more likely it is, that when they recover from it they will hurry as far into another: ſo that reformation is often nothing more than a change of error. Thus it happened in the pagan theology. The profeſſors of it, and the people in general, had acknowledged a divine nature; which was human nature under a different name, and placed in a different habitation. Their divinities, from MOMUS the ſon of night, up to JUPITER the father of gods and men, were in truth celeſtial and immortal men, endued with more knowledge, and with more and greater powers; but with all theſe after the manner of men, and diveſted neither of human paſſions nor of human vices. Theſe objects of adoration were monſtrous. So was the worſhip paid to them. But then, as faſt as philoſophers exploded theſe corporeal notions, for ſuch they may be properly called, of the divine nature, and endeavoured to ſpiritualiſe it in their thoughts by abſtraction from the human, they refined theology, with much confuſion and obſcurity of ideas, from a ſyſtem of phyſical into a ſyſtem of metaphyſical fables; and a ſort of intellectual mythology took the place of the former. Mythology, properly ſo called, ſerved in the infancy of ſcience to conceal the ignorance of philoſophers. Of the coſmogonia they made a theogonia. Such the poets taught, and multiplied polytheiſm by their ſuppoſed ſcience, and very real flattery. Allegory ſucceeded and ſerved to conceal the abſurdity of theology. They who taught it grew as mad as their predeceſſors had been abſurd, and very little leſs profane. The few remains of pythagorean doctrines, the metaphyſical and theological parts of PLATO's writings, and above all thoſe of the latter pythagoreans and platonicians which are

in our hands, will juſtify what is here advanced; for, ſurely, no men who were thought to be in their ſenſes, and were ſuffered to go about without their keepers, did ever talk ſuch nonſenſe as is to be found in PORPHYRY, PLOTINUS, JAMBLICUS, and thoſe who have been infected with the ſame phrenſy. Such of theſe philoſophers as oppoſed chriſtianity, oppoſed to the marvellous of this theology the marvellous of their own, and none of our angelical or ſeraphic doctors, none of our raviſhed myſtics, ever roſe higher in illuminations, viſions, and rapturous unions with the divinity, than ſome of them. On the other hand, many of theſe philoſophers became converts in different manners. Platoniſm mixed eaſily with chriſtianity; but they who retained moſt of the former, infected the latter with innumerable errors, and planted or watered all the hereſies that ſtarted up daily in the firſt ages of the church. Such were the gnoſtics or the learned, who, under pretence of improving, corrupted the ſimplicity of the religion they had embraced. They who became afterwards the greateſt lights of the church, apologiſts, confeſſors, ſaints, and martyrs, were determined to chriſtianity by their philoſophy, as well as the others, and came full fraught with platoniſm into the holy pale. But they uſed it more modeſtly. They made it the hand-maid, not the rival, of chriſtianity: and tho this hand-maid governed the family, and took a principal ſhare in ordering the whole ſcheme and oeconomy of it, yet the authority of the miſtreſs was always pretended. JUSTIN owns that platoniſm prepared him to be a Chriſtian: and ORIGEN, a man far ſuperior to the good martyr, ran as platonically mad, in the ſecond century, as PICUS of Mirandola, TICINUS, PATRICIUS, or any of the renowned platonicians, in the fifteenth. I know not whether the deſpair of attaining any other way a full knowledge of divine truths, which SOCRATES and PLATO had ſo often inculcated, might not diſpoſe theſe men to receive

ceive a revelation, to prefer faith to uncertainty, and, ſince they could not fix their minds on theſe ſubjects by reaſon, to fix them by authority, as the diſciples of PYTHAGORAS did.

THO I aſcribe ſo much to the mere influence of philoſophy, and believe it to have been the frantic mother of a frantic offspring, I do not mean to exclude abſolutely that of grace on this occaſion, tho I confeſs that I have no conception of it, nor to deny that this directed in ſome meaſure the other: and, to prove that I do not, I will quote the example and authority of St. AUSTIN, to ſhew how theſe two co-operated in him, and how the firſt prepared him, by God's immediate appointment, for the laſt, in one of the moſt ſublime articles of chriſtian faith. The ſaint laments in the ſeventh book of his confeſſions, the grievous errors in which he had been engaged concerning the divine nature, and the original of evil, on both of which he had followed the opinions of the manichaeans. He relates the ſteps by which he was delivered from theſe errors, as well as from the ſuperſtition of aſtrology and divination, and the approaches he made to truth by the helps that God procured him. After this, he breaks out into ejaculations of thanks to God, who had taken pity on him, and had procured him ſome books of platonic philoſophy, wherein he found the divinity of the Word eſtabliſhed by many arguments. Of the incarnation of the Word, indeed, he found nothing. But he found it afterwards in the ſcriptures, and he remained perſuaded that God had prepared him, by this accidental information, for what he was to learn when he ſhould ſtudy the ſcriptures concerning the humiliation of the Word made fleſh *; the reaſons of which perſuaſion he gives, in the twentieth

* Miſeratus es terram et cinerem —— procuraſti mihi per quendam hominem, immaniſſimo typho turgidum, quoſdam platonicorum libros ex graeca lingua in lati-

twentieth chapter. Thus you ſee how PLATO, in the wanderings of a wild imagination, had diſcovered, in part at leaſt, one of the greateſt myſteries of chriſtianity, and how God made uſe of this truth, which he who publiſhed it did not know to be ſuch, for the converſion of one of the greateſt doctors and ſaints of the church. What wonder is it that metaphyſics, the very dotage of philoſophy, ſhould bear witneſs to ſome of thoſe truths, which may come out of the mouths of babes and ſucklings?

SECTION XVII.

ANOTHER cauſe of the multiplication of extravagant opinions and ſects, in chriſtianity, has been the arbitrary practice of giving different ſenſes to the ſame paſſages of the bible. A practice derived from the jewiſh maſters, the worſt certainly that can be followed if we ſeek truth, and are deſirous to preſerve any preciſion either in fact or argument. Among the loweſt artifices, that have been imployed by thoſe who ſeek to impoſe their own inventions under ſome other and better authority than their own, this has been one of the loweſt and groſſeſt, tho not the leaſt ſucceſsful. It is in truth a kind of forgery, ſince it ſerves to make an author ſay what he had no intention to ſay, or renders at the beſt uncertain what he did intend to ſay when he writ with the greateſt clearneſs. The jewiſh rabbins have done by the old, and our chriſtian rabbins by the new and old teſtament both, what PETER did by his father's will in our friend SWIFT's tale of a tub. The text was againſt

nam verſos, et ibi legi &c. —— non quidem his verbis, ſed hoc idem omnino multis et multiplicibus ſuaderi rationibus, quod in principio erat verbum, et verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat verbum. —— in quos me propterea priuſquam ſcripturas tuas conſiderarem, credo voluiſti incurrere, ut imprimeretur &c.

him,

him, but by a new combination of the ſame words, or ſyllables, or letters, he made it ſpeak for him and ſupport his claim. It had been well if MARTIN and JOHN, and the reſt of PETER's brethren, for he had many more which the hiſtorian thought it not worth his while to mention, had ſtood their ground like good caraites, and had adhered to the text in the plain and obvious meaning of it, inſtead of imitating the very men whom they have oppoſed, and whom they laugh at. But they have done otherwiſe. They have ſupported their deciſions by the ſame unjuſtifiable means, by which the rabbiniſt PETER ſupported his. Nay they have done more, they have admitted divers codicils, and have, like him, ſuppoſed them to be of equal authority with the will, tho it is plain that the father ſpeaks in the will, and his ſtewards or other domeſtics in the codicils. Allow me another compariſon. It may illuſtrate the folly, as the former explains the fraud, of this practice. The Chineſe reverence much the table of FOHI, which muſt be nine or ten centuries older than ADAM, according to their chronology. This table conſiſts of ſeveral lines, ſome ſhorter, ſome longer, and placed in a certain order like that of a diagram or ſcheme, ſerving, as they imagine, to the deſign or demonſtration of the moſt ſublime knowledge. The learned men among them have been employed ſeveral thouſand years in attempts to draw ſome of this ſublime knowledge out of the table. The way they have taken, and what other could they take, if they had leiſure enough to take any? has been to make all the poſſible tranſpoſitions, and different combinations, of theſe lines, in hopes of affixing ſome ſenſe to this myſtical table. The conſequence has been, that they have affixed ſeveral, and that they agree in none. Now tho I am perſuaded, that the accounts the jeſuits * give us of this table are imperfect, and that ſomething more than barely theſe unequal lines, ſome-

* Scien. Sinica.

thing

thing hieroglyphical at leaſt, belongs to it; yet whether it be ſo or no, the anecdote is equally appoſite to my purpoſe: for in either caſe, the chineſe and the chriſtian critics have been imployed alike. If the table conſiſts of unintelligible lines, and it would be the ſame if it conſiſted of unintelligible words, whereof FOHI has given no clue to explain and determine the ſenſe, the chineſe critics have been imployed juſt as reaſonably as the chriſtian expoſitors of myſteries, neither fully nor plainly revealed by revelation itſelf. If it be ſaid, that the table, which none but he who made it could explain, explains itſelf, as our ſcriptures do in all the eſſential parts of them, the compariſon holds ſtill; for the learned Chineſe muſt have done, as the learned Chriſtians have done, and have made myſteries for ſome purpoſe or other where they found none. It is impoſſible by any means that art can find to ſee in the dark; but it is eaſy to contrive glaſſes that ſhall ſhew the plaineſt and moſt uniform object in a miſt, and under various forms in the cleareſt day. The firſt is a ſilly, and the laſt a knaviſh attempt. I ſaid juſt now that it was a kind of forgery. I do not recal my words, but add, that in the caſe here ſuppoſed, the Chineſe are much more excuſable than the Chriſtians; for if the Chineſe have forged different words of FOHI, Chriſtians have forged different words of God.

How can we lay leſs than this to their charge, when we conſider in how many different, remote, and inconſiſtent ſenſes, ſuch as deſtroy one another, and ſuch as are advanced on no authority but that of their own imaginations, they interpret the ſame paſſages of holy writ? There is, according to theſe doctors, a grammatical, a literal or hiſtorical, an allegorical or figurative, an anagogical or divine, and a tropological or moral, ſenſe. Some, or all of theſe, may be applied to the ſame ſentence, nay to the ſame word. Light, in that noble paſſage of the

the book of Geneſis, where it is ſaid, " let there be light and " there was light," ſignifies very plainly, in the grammatical, literal, and only proper ſenſe, the corporeal light which God created, and concerning which alone it was at all to the purpoſe to ſpeak in that place. But divines, by their arbitrary power over the ſcriptures, make it to ſignify the Meſſiah allegorically, and tropologically or anagogically the inward light of grace, or the outward ſplendor of celeſtial glory. Thus again, by virtue of the ſame power, Jeruſalem, which is the name of a town, has been made to ſignify the viſion of peace, the church militant, the church triumphant, and the ſoul of a believer *. The ſenſe of no writings, neither ſacred nor profane, can be ever fixed, if they remain ſubject to ſuch licentious interpretations. Theſe interpretations have ſerved, and they could be intended to ſerve, by the Jews who ſet, and by the Chriſtians who followed the example, no other purpoſe, than that of furniſhing the rabbins of both religions with means of giving a color of divine authority to all their own inventions. The abſurdities which the former have advanced on ſuch interpretations, ſeconded by thoſe of their oral law and cabbala, and which you may find in our modern writers, that were ſkilled in rabbinical learning, are innumerable, and paſs all meaſure of probability; ſo that one cannot help being aſtoniſhed, when ſome of our chriſtian divines lament moſt piouſly the loſs of thoſe rules, according to which the Jews interpreted their ſcriptures, as they ſuppoſe; for that there were any ſuch ſtated rules obſerved is but ſuppoſition.

It is more probable, that the Jews did, as the Chriſtians have done; that they followed their ſeveral imaginations, or their ſeveral theological and even ſecular intereſts. This was the caſe among Jews and Chriſtians both, and if it may be ſaid,

* Vid. Calmet.

which

which is not very clear however, that the latter have not fallen generally into ſo many puerilities and palpable errors as the others, the moſt unreaſoning, the moſt ignorant, and the moſt abſurd of men, yet they have rendered theology more voluminous, and, with reſpect to the divine nature and oeconomy, more contentious than it was before. St. AUSTIN ſeems to aim at a ſort of compoſition about the interpretation of the ſcriptures, in a letter to MARCELLINUS *. He ſays, that "how good "ſoever any reaſon may appear, it is falſe and deceitful if it "contradicts them; and that how clearly ſoever we may think "any thing deduced from them, if the thing be manifeſtly "againſt reaſon, we are deceived; it is not the true ſenſe of "the paſſages alledged; truth and they cannot ſtand in oppoſi-"tion." We may obſerve in this place, what is to be obſerved often in the writings of this ſaint, a gingle of words, that pretends to ſtrength and preciſion, and has neither really.

THE firſt propoſition ſuppoſes a caſe that can never happen among reaſonable men, who have received the chriſtian revelation for genuine, after a ſufficient examination of the external and internal proofs. Such men, having found nothing that makes it inconſiſtent with itſelf, nor that is repugnant to any of thoſe divine truths which reaſon and the works of God demonſtrate to them, will never ſet up reaſon in contradiction to it, on account of things plainly taught, but incomprehenſible as to their manner of being. If they did, their reaſon would be falſe and deceitful; they would ceaſe to be reaſonable men: and St. AUSTIN ſays nothing to the purpoſe, if he confounds theſe things with ſuch as imply contradiction, and means an oppoſition of reaſon to the former only. But if we could ſuppoſe, or if St. AUSTIN could mean to ſuppoſe, that they who followed the rule he lays down in another place, the rule of

* Ep. 143.

believing

believing firſt, in hopes of underſtanding afterwards, ſhould diſcover things, when they came to examine in order to underſtand, that implied contradiction, his concluſion would be falſe. They would be obliged in this caſe to reject the revelation, not their reaſon; or to fall at once into a general and particular abſurdity. The general abſurdity of renouncing the faculties God had given them of diſtinguiſhing truth from falſhood, good from evil; and the particular abſurdity of renouncing, in favor of the internal, that very rule by which they had judged in favor of the external proofs of this revelation.

The ſecond propoſition admits and encourages the very practice we cenſure ſo juſtly, for which the ſaint was ſo famous, and by which he contributed ſo much to promote contentions in his own days, and to perpetuate them to ours. The practice of deducing doctrines from the ſcriptures, that are not evidently contained in them, for if they were evidently contained in them, they could not be ſaid to be deduced from them, is admitted. It is admitted, that theſe deductions may be manifeſtly againſt reaſon. Several ſuch there were, and among them ſome of his own. Reaſon is made the judge of doctrines thus deduced; but when reaſon condemns any, divines, the inventors or fautors of them, are at liberty to evade the objections they cannot anſwer by interpretations of the ſame paſſages in ſome other and new ſenſe. Who does not ſee, that the direct tendency of this practice is exactly the ſame as the event has proved it to be? It compoſes and propagates a religion, ſeemingly under the authority of God, but really under that of man. The principles of revelation are loſt in theology, or disfigured by it: and whilſt ſome men are impudent enough to pretend, others are ſilly enough to believe, that they adhere to the goſpel, and maintain the cauſe of God againſt infidels and heretics, when they do nothing better, nor more than

eſpouſe the conceits of men, whom enthuſiaſm, or the ambition of forming ſects, or of making a great figure in them, has inſpired. If you aſk now what the practice of the chriſtian fathers, and of other divines, ſhould have been, in order to preſerve the purity of faith, and to promote peace and charity, the anſwer is obvious, and ſo evidently agreeable to right reaſon, that the modeſteſt man alive might make it before an occumenical council without bluſhing. They ſhould have adhered to the word of God; they ſhould have paid no regard to heathen philoſophy, jewiſh cabbala, the ſallies of enthuſiaſm, or the refinements of human ingenuity. They ſhould have embraced, and held faſt the articles of faith and doctrine, that were delivered in plain terms, or in unequivocal figures; they ſhould not have been dogmatical, where the ſenſe was doubtful, nor have preſumed even to gueſs, where the holy ghoſt left the veil of myſtery undrawn. If the council ſhould decree, that this anſwer was erroneous, and that the ſyſtem of chriſtianity would have been incomplete and inſufficient without theſe adventitious helps, let us make no ſcruple of ſaying, that the council would decree blaſphemouſly, as more councils than one have done, ſince they would decree, that infinite wiſdom had not proportioned means to ends, or that the ends of infinite wiſdom were more or other than the goſpel of CHRIST aſſigns.

SECTION XVIII.

THE uncertainty of that precarious tradition, whoſe authority has been ſo magnified, may be ſet down as a third cauſe of the multiplication of doctrines and ſects in the chriſtian church. The truth of facts, however notorious, and even of thoſe that men have the leaſt intereſt or temptation to falſify, is truſted

truſted very unſafely to tradition. How much more unſafe muſt this conveyance be, when it is that of opinions and doctrines, intricate, and therefore eaſily miſtaken, diſputed or diſputable, and therefore induſtriouſly miſrepreſented? BARROW, in his expoſition on the creed, takes away this great foundation of theology; for tho he aſſerts, that there are proper and ſufficient means to diſcern the genuine doctrines and dictates of chriſtianity, yet he leaves us in effect none but the writings of the evangeliſts, and the epiſtles of two or three apoſtles who had been diſciples. According to him and to right reaſon, the firſt and beſt way of preſerving doctrines is to preſerve them in the writings of the authors of them; tho even this cannot be deemed abſolutely ſecure. It is far from being certain, that genuine peripatetiſm is every where plainly read in the writings of ARISTOTLE, as they are come down to us: and if PYTHAGORAS and SOCRATES had writ, or if the works of ZENO were extant, we ſhould be beſt aſſured, better than any other way, what their philoſophies were, but ſtill not without ſome poſſibility of error. Another way of preſerving doctrines, is to preſerve them in the writings of diſciples, that immediately received them from the authors. Thus the writings of PLATO and XENOPHON tell us, with a good degree of certainty, what SOCRATES taught: and yet theſe writings give very different and contradictory accounts of the ſocratic philoſophy. The next way that BARROW mentions is the preſervation of doctrines in the writings of thoſe who writ at larger diſtances of time, as thoſe of the ſtoics were preſerved in the writings of CICERO, SENECA, and EPICTETUS. This way he allows to be more imperfect than the former, becauſe every writer is apt to miſapprehend and miſrepreſent----to do ſomewhat more than tranſcribe---- to comment and deſcant---- to adorn and ſet out, to confirm or confute the doctrine they relate, in order thereto repreſenting it with advantage to their purpoſe. The laſt way

is that of oral tradition, the moſt liable to defect and corruption of any according to this judicious expoſitor. Men do as before, and in this caſe with greater advantage, "accommodate "doctrines to their own prejudices, inclinations, and deſigns. "The farther ſuch tradition departs from the original ſpring, "the more ſubject it is to contract ſuch alterations and impu- "rities. Every doctrine, thus propagated, is like a ſtream at "the head, ſmall and narrow, but clear and pure. Proceed- "ing on, it grows larger and fouler. So tradition ſwells, by "taking in what oblique channels of private fancy and pragma- "tical invention diſcharge into it, and by receiving tincture "from particular inclination or politic deſign it grows muddy "and feculent."

THE genuine doctrines, and dictates of chriſtianity, have not been conveyed to us by the firſt of theſe four ways; for the ſaviour publiſhed his goſpel by preaching, and by occaſional diſcourſes, and not by writing. But they have been preſerved by the ſecond; for two of the four evangeliſts had been diſciples from the firſt, and witneſſes, not only of all that had paſſed during his miſſion, but of his reſurrection. They had, therefore, received immediately from the author the doctrines they publiſhed in his name. Who the other two were, it is impoſſible to ſay with ſufficient aſſurance, amidſt the fabulous or little authentic reports of eccleſiaſtical writers. But if MARK was the convert, the ſcholar, and the amanuenſis of PETER, his teſtimony comes nearer to that required under this head, ſince PETER was a diſciple, one of the twelve, than the teſtimony of LUKE, who belonged in all theſe relations to PAUL; ſince PAUL was no diſciple, neither one of the twelve, nor one of the ſeventy, if, in truth, there was any ſuch ſeventy, had received nothing immediately from CHRIST, nor had any apoſtolical commiſſion, except that which he aſſumes in the Acts of the apoſtles written by

by LUKE, and dictated, probably, by himself. I say probably, because it is possible LUKE might have been an eye and ear-witness of part of all he relates in the Acts, as St. JEROM observes; tho he could be no more than an hearsay witness of what he relates in the gospel, since he owns, in the beginning of it, that he writ, like many others, what he had been told.

WHEN divines urge, on this occasion, that the differences between MATTHEW and MARK, as well as others, are accounted for, and an intire harmony of the gospels is established, by critics, so that they all confirm one another, infidels, I know, will cavil, and sometimes plausibly, against many things that must be assumed to make this harmony appear, and to reconcile these differences. When it is urged again, that the gifts of the holy ghost, and an immediate inspiration being bestowed on all the disciples in an eminent manner and alike, they are all to be esteemed witnesses alike, and they all received the doctrines of christianity immediately from God, the author of it, tho not by the mouth of the saviour whilst he was in the flesh. I know too, that the same men will not remain without a reply. For instance, they will insist that all this, if allowed, will prove nothing in favor of MARK nor LUKE, nor even PAUL himself, who were neither of the twelve nor of the seventy; after which they will add, perhaps, "ex abundantia," that none of these three, having been designed by God to stand in the place of that disciple who had betrayed JESUS, and to fill up the number of the apostles, MATTHIAS alone, with the eleven, could pass in any sense for one of those disciples who had received the doctrines of christianity immediately from the author of them; tho the seventy might be, as it is said they were, appointed to be witnesses of the resurrection. ERASMUS, in the first chapter of his paraphrase on the Acts, makes CHRIST say to all the disciples,

diſciples, that the holy ſpirit, which he had breathed upon them, and which he promiſed ſhould deſcend upon them from above, would not only recal to their minds all he had taught them, but ſuggeſt likewiſe to them whatever elſe it might become neceſſary for them to know. But the cavillers, of whom we ſpeak, will urge, that theſe words were added by ERASMUS for reaſons very obvious, and are not contained in the text; nor is even the ſenſe of them implied ſo far as to authoriſe the diſciples, and much leſs any that were not of their number, to add any thing to the conditions of ſalvation that CHRIST himſelf had impoſed. Such cavils will be raiſed, I ſay, but they will deſerve to have little weight, as long as it is out of diſpute that we have in our hands the goſpels of * MATTHEW and JOHN, who give themſelves to us for eye-witneſſes of all that CHRIST did, and of all that happened to him, and ear-witneſſes at the ſame time of all the doctrines he taught. Two channels were as ſufficient as four to convey theſe doctrines to the world, and to preſerve them in their original purity. The manner too, in which theſe evangeliſts recorded them, was much better adapted to this purpoſe than that of PLATO, or even of XENOPHON, to preſerve the doctrines of SOCRATES. The evangeliſts did not content themſelves to give a general account of the doctrines of CHRIST in their own words, nor preſume, in feigned dialogues, to make him deliver their opinions in his own name, and as his own doctrines. They recorded his doctrines particularly, they recorded them in the very words in which he taught them, and they were careful to mention the ſeveral occaſions on which he delivered them to his diſciples or others. If therefore PLATO and XENOPHON tell us, with a good degree of certainty, what SOCRATES taught, the two evangeliſts ſeem to tell us, with much more, what the ſaviour taught, and com-

* N. B. I ſpeak of both alike, tho I am not ignorant of what has been ſaid that might weaken the authority of MATTHEW's goſpel.

manded

manded them to teach. In a word, we may ſay, on theſe grounds, that the genuine doctrines of chriſtianity have been preſerved much better than thoſe of heathen philoſophy, in the ſecond way of preſerving doctrines, tho they have not been preſerved in the firſt and beſt, as ſome of the others have been.

THE third and fourth ways of preſerving doctrines, which BARROW mentions, have ſo near a relation, that they may be thrown into one. They who decide about doctrines, or who write about them, at great diſtances of time from the firſt diſciples, are more eaſily impoſed upon by traditions, and can more eaſily impoſe them on others. Both theſe things fell out, and no caſe can be well ſuppoſed wherein the truth of fact, or the purity of doctrine, was ſo liable to be corrupted, or was in fact ſo much, or ſo ſoon corrupted, as in the propagation of chriſtianity. The mixed crowd of Jews and heathens that embraced it, and the very manner of propagating it, rendered this corruption unavoidable.

THE Jews had begun long before this time to corrupt their own religion. They had borrowed many ſuperſtitious opinions from Egypt, and the eaſtern nations; and pythagorean and platonic metaphyſics, which they had entertained after they became acquainted with the Greeks, and lived under the domination of the SELEUCIDES and the PTOLEMIES, were imported both by them and the heathen converts into chriſtianity; by the helleniſt Jews more than by thoſe of Paleſtine, and by the heathen more than by either. Chriſtianity began in Judaea; it derived it's authority and it's proofs from the jewiſh ſcriptures, the authenticity and divinity of which it every where ſuppoſes. The author of it was a Jew; and, as the religion he inſtituted tended not directly to deſtroy judaiſm, ſo the chriſtian

ſtian church at Jeruſalem conformed long, as CHRIST himſelf had done conſtantly, to the antient religion. On all theſe accounts, the jewiſh converts might regard chriſtianity as a branch of judaiſm, and take the ſame liberties of retrenching, of adding, of altering, with one, as had been taken with the other. They had acknowledged JESUS to be the Meſſiah foretold by their prophets. In this, they had gone beyond the phariſees, who rejected him, as the phariſees had gone, in receiving all the books of the old Teſtament, beyond the ſaducees, who received the pentateuch, and rejected all the others. The phariſees had added an oral to the written law. They believed the reſurrection of the dead, the immortality of the ſoul, future rewards and puniſhments, the metempſychoſis, and other doctrines utterly unknown to MOSES, which they accommodated ſome how or other to his law. They made up a new ſyſtem of theology, by ſuch accommodations of the law to their traditions and their philoſophy. Why ſhould not the chriſtian Jews we ſpeak of make up a new ſyſtem likewiſe, by blending all theſe and chriſtianity together, as they could beſt reconcile them? The example of PHILO, who did not profeſs chriſtianity indeed, but who found means to make the platonic opinions of the deity, and thoſe of MOSES agree, might encourage them in the attempt.

MUCH in the ſame manner the pagan converts might, and certainly did proceed. They found a great analogy between the moſt ſublime and important doctrines of chriſtianity, and thoſe which ſome of their philoſophers had taught, and they might eaſily be led from hence to think, that a ſameneſs of doctrine denoted a ſameneſs of authority. This will appear the more probable, if we conſider, that not only ſome heretics, but ſeveral of the moſt orthodox fathers, believed all thoſe to be illuminated from above, who purified their minds, ſeparated their

their ſouls as much as poſſible from their bodies, and died this philoſophical death in order to arrive at a philoſophical regeneration, according to the notions that metaphyſical enthuſiaſm had eſtabliſhed *. Thus, JUSTIN the martyr makes CHRIST to have been known, in ſome ſort, to SOCRATES †. It could not be otherwiſe. The ſoul of SOCRATES was a purified ſoul, and CHRIST the illuminating word. St. AUSTIN was much of the ſame mind, and ſays little leſs than JUSTIN of this philoſopher.

THE eclectic ſect, which POTAMO founded about this time at Alexandria, might give farther occaſion to the heathen converts to corrupt chriſtianity. This ſect profeſſed a detachment from all ſects, in the ſearch of truth: they were

" Nullius addicti jurare in verba magiſtri."

They delivered themſelves from the chains of philoſophical bigotry. They might hold ſome to one and ſome to another ſyſtem of philoſophy in the main, as their different judgments or prejudices inclined them; but they aſſerted the reaſonable liberty of embracing truth wherever they found it, and without any regard to the tenets even of that ſect towards which they leaned the oſteneſt and the moſt. SOTION paſſed for a ſtoic, and his ſcholar SENECA profeſſed himſelf ſuch §. Yet SOTION was fond of pythagorean doctrines, and SENECA ‖ made no ſcruple of borrowing from EPICURUS. PLOTINUS was a platonician, and yet he adopted doctrines, ſuch, we may preſume eſpecially, as were ſubtile and myſterious, both from the ſtoics and the peripatetics. CLEMENT ** was a Chriſtian, who taught chriſtianity by his public leſſons at Alexandria, and who de-

* PLATO, PLUT. JAMB. et alibi. —— liberatio à corpore celebratiſſima mors eſt philoſophica.
† Apol. 1.
§ SENEC. ep. 58.
‖ SENEC. paſſim.
** Strom. l. 1.

fended it by his writings, and yet he approved this manner of philoſophiſing; we may conclude too, that it was the method of that ſchool. AMMONIUS was the preceptor of PLOTINUS and of ORIGEN. PLOTINUS deſerted chriſtianity, and bred up an inveterate enemy to it in PORPHYRY; or if he continued a Chriſtian to the laſt, as EUSEBIUS ſays ſomewhere that he did, for no better reaſon, perhaps, than to keep a name of ſo great renown in the chriſtian catalogue, he dreſſed up his Chriſtian, with ſo much pagan theology, that he might paſs for a profeſſor of either. ORIGEN, on the other hand, who had heard CLEMENT, as well as AMMONIUS, was ſuch a zealous Chriſtian, that he aſpired to ſuffer martyrdom, like his father, and did actually execute one ſort, that of caſtration on himſelf; by which however he avoided another, that of temptation. ORIGEN ſignaliſed himſelf in the eclectic method. His warm imagination carried him into allegorical and cabaliſtical interpretations of the ſcriptures, and his immenſe reading furniſhed him with a multitude of notions borrowed from pagan theology. Many of theſe he introduced into chriſtianity: and his book of principles was a repertory of the moſt extravagant opinions. Heretical too they were declared by men leſs learned, leſs zealous, perhaps, but certainly more politic, and more circumſpect in obſerving the courſe that orthodoxy took, than himſelf.

FROM what has been ſaid it is evident, that ſuch a motley crowd of Jews and heathens, as the firſt converts to chriſtianity were, could not fail to mix a leaven of judaic and heathen theology into the chriſtian ſyſtem, and thereby to ſwell, to perplex, and ferment it. Had they kept cloſely to what the ſaviour taught, all this had been avoided: and ſuppoſing chriſtianity to have been purely an human invention, it had been the moſt amiable and the moſt uſeful invention that was ever

impoſed

impoſed on mankind for their good. But the extenſions of it, and the engraftments that were made on this divine ſtock, by mere human philoſophy, and by religious prejudices already entertained, produced a ſyſtem, or rather cauſed divers ſyſtems to grow up, of fantaſtical theology. Chriſtianity, as it came out of the hands of God, if I may uſe the expreſſion, was a moſt ſimple and intelligible rule of belief, worſhip, and manners; which is the true notion of a religion. As ſoon as men preſumed to add any thing of their own to it, the human alloy corrupted the divine maſs, and it became an object of vain, intricate, and contentious ſcience. Such it continued to be: and the very manner in which truth was propagated, ſerved to eſtabliſh error.

The doctrines of chriſtianity, and the facts that proved the divinity of it, were publiſhed by diſcourſe not by writing. Christ preached; he was the greateſt of preachers, and he ſent his diſciples out to preach *. They purſued their miſſion thro different countries; and as faſt as they formed a church in one, they haſtened to another. At leaſt this was the practice of St. Paul, who ſcattered about more ſpiritual ſeed than all the reſt, and more widely. Peter was a very itinerant miſſionary too, if we give credit to Eusebius, which I do very ſeldom. This writer makes him travel over a great part of Aſia minor, and even to the people of Pontus; becauſe he ſpeaks of theſe nations, tho not of his preaching to them, in his firſt epiſtle. It is much more likely that he continued in Paleſtine and the neighbourhood, and that, perhaps, he never went even to Rome, whither you pretended catholics ſend him, that you may impoſe, as you have done without proof and againſt common ſenſe, the eccleſiaſtical tyranny of the biſhops of that ſee, his ſuppoſed ſucceſſors, on the chriſtian world. Paul indeed

* Summus ille eccleſiaſtes. —— verbum et ſermo Dei. Eras. de rat. concion.

was a great traveller, as I have ſaid, moving about from place to place almoſt continually during the greateſt part of the time that paſſed between his baptiſm and his death; that is, according to the calculation of ERASMUS, thirty five years. He went over the countries, where PETER taught, more than once. He had been in Arabia before. He viſited Greece and moſt of the iſlands. He penetrated beyond Thracia and Macedonia into Illyria. He returned into Paleſtine, and was ſent in chains from thence to Rome.

How theſe two apoſtles preached, for of the reſt we have no need to ſpeak, and ſhould have little to ſay, may be ſeen by their public diſcourſes recorded in the Acts, and might be gueſſed by the ſtyle and matter of their epiſtles. To ſhew how they ſucceeded in their miſſions, one example will be ſufficient. PAUL had preached eighteen months or two years at Corinth, and had ſettled a church there. The Corinthians did not renounce chriſtianity as ſoon as he had left them; but they corrupted it both in opinion and practice, and fell back into all their former habits of vice and debauchery. It was, on this occaſion, that the apoſtle writ his two epiſtles to the Corinthians, and in them we ſee the particular errors and abuſes that were grown in a ſhort time to a great head in that city. Among theſe, it is to our preſent purpoſe to mention ſome. The taint of heathen philoſophy remained upon them; and they had contracted a gnoſtical contempt for the ſimplicity of the goſpel, and of evangelical teachers. Falſe apoſtles from Judaea had introduced ſuperſtitious opinions and practices, and had perſuaded them to regard the law of MOSES as neceſſary to be obſerved with that of CHRIST. They were divided into ſects, and affected pre-eminence according to the dignity they aſcribed to thoſe by whom they had been baptiſed, to APOLLOS, to CEPHAS, to PAUL. For theſe, and for many other things, they

they are ſeverely reproved in the firſt of the two epiſtles I have mentioned: and tho St. PAUL ſeems ſatisfied in the ſecond with their ſubmiſſion and amendment, yet is it certain, that the ſame errors and abuſes continued or revived in the church of Corinth, and in others. JEROM * ſays in general, that even in his time the remains of them appeared in Achaia, and St. AUSTIN †, taking notice in particular of the ſuperſtitious waſhings of the feet, laments, that the church of CHRIST was ſubjected to more than judaical ſervitude under the load of external obſervances.

IT was eaſy to intermix, in this manner of promulgating the goſpel, as many philoſophical and phariſaical conceits as the prejudices or purpoſes of the ſeveral preachers of it required: and when they were once well mingled together, as tradition varied thoſe of one ſort, or multiplied thoſe of another, public writings and eccleſiaſtical authority were added to increaſe and perpetuate the confuſion in which chriſtianity was delivered down to poſterity, and in which it continues even at this day. A ſtate not to be quite parallelled by that of any other religion, as I believe; neither by the mahometan, however divided, nor by that of FOE, into how many ſects ſoever it has been broken among the eaſtern nations. But we muſt not imagine, that the diverſity of ſects, and the oppoſition and confuſion of doctrines, which were principal, were ſole cauſes of the uncertainty of the traditions of the primitive church, or were cauſed ſolely by the manner of promulgating chriſtianity. Other cauſes of this diviſion and confuſion exiſted and concurred, either mediately thro them, or by their own immediate effects, to corrupt tradition, and hinder the chriſtian ſyſtem from acquiring any appearance of conſiſtency.

* Praefat. 2di lib. com. in ep. ad Galatas. † Ep. ad JANUARIUM.

SEC-

SECTION XIX.

To collect inſtances of all the extravagancies which were broached at that time, which almoſt choaked the tender ſhoots of chriſtianity, and which grew up with them, like weeds among the corn, would be endleſs and needleſs both. I will recal one alone of the enthuſiaſm that prevailed, and of the impudence with which ſome men impoſed on the ſimplicity of others. We find it in PAUL's ſecond epiſtle to the Corinthians. The effect of his firſt, whatever that was, encouraged him to write in this more plainly and more bitterly againſt the falſe teachers, and more highly in praiſe of himſelf, his authority, and his merit, which he ſcruples not to prefer to that of all the other apoſtles. On this occaſion it appears, that the falſe teachers had the front to aſſure, and to make the firſt chriſtian converts believe, that they had an immediate communication with celeſtial beings. This gave them an air of ſuperiority to which St. PAUL thought it not proper to ſubmit, as indeed it was not, ſince that would have been to ſubmit his authority to theirs, and the goſpel he taught to the goſpels they taught. The leaſt he could do, and it is obſervable, that his modeſty would allow him to do no more, was to oppoſe his own raptures and viſions to thoſe which theſe men pretended to have, and to declare, that he too had been wrapped up into the third heaven, either in body, or ſpirit, where he had learned things incomprehenſible and ineffable.

WHAT has been ſaid very ſummarily may ſerve, however, to ſhew, that it was not poſſible, traditions derived from the firſt, and thro the moſt early ages of chriſtianity, ſhould convey either facts or doctrines down with a due authenticity and preciſion, unleſs a continued miracle had ſubſiſted to alter the

the nature of things, and to produce effects repugnant to their cauſes. But there remain ſome circumſtances ſtill, which deſerve to be mentioned. It has been obſerved already, that the fondneſs of the firſt Chriſtians for pagan theology carried them, not only to borrow from it, but to forge books under the names of ſuch as had been famous divines in the Eaſt, in Egypt, and elſewhere. Even this did not content them. They not only introduced, with equal abſurdity and falſhood, theſe authorities to confirm the moſt ſublime myſteries of chriſtianity, and to teach men the way to ſalvation *, but they compoſed a multitude of different goſpels, not leſs, I believe, than forty, to give the authority of a divine original to all the fabulous traditions, ſuperſtitious practices, and extravagant doctrines, which were adopted, or invented by the different ſects. Thus the gnoſtics had their goſpel; the marcionites had theirs; the valentinians had theirs, and even JUDAS ISCARIOT had his †. Apocalypſes, or books of revelations, were not ſo numerous; but of theſe too there were ſeveral. One of theſe particularly, the apocalypſe of St. PAUL, I could almoſt wiſh that we had, ſince it pretended to relate the ineffable things he ſaw in the third heaven. But it is loſt as well as others: and if that which we have under the name of St. JOHN had been loſt likewiſe, there might have been ſome madmen the fewer, and chriſtianity would not have ſuffered ſo much.

THERE was another practice in the primitive church, which may find it's place properly enough here, becauſe it ſerved to corrupt the traditions of the church, and to fill the eccleſiaſtical annals with lying legends; tho it did not corrupt the doctrines of chriſtianity ſo directly as the others. The practice I mean is, that of writing pious romances, under the pretence of writing the lives of ſaints, and the deaths of martyrs. This

* Via ad ſalutem——indicata. † Cod. apoc. nov. teſtam. of FABRICIUS.

practice

practice grew ſo frequent, and theſe romances were held in ſuch eſteem, that a certain eccleſiaſtic of the greek church, one METAPHRASTUS *, I think, publiſhed a treatiſe of criticiſm on the ſubject, and laid down rules for the compoſition of them. Chriſtian hiſtorians, like thoſe of Greece who wrote after the expedition of ALEXANDER, imagined they could never add too much of the marvellous to ſo many marvellous events. Their readers ſeemed to be of the ſame mind: and hiſtory became romance in order to pleaſe. Theſe hiſtories too of ſaints and martyrs were panegyrics as well as romances, and had the ſame effect that TULLY aſcribes ſomewhere to the funeral orations of the Romans, which corrupted tradition firſt, and hiſtory afterwards. Well might they have this effect, when they were authoriſed by the greateſt and moſt admired fathers of the church; when ſuch a man as St. AUSTIN, for inſtance, read ſuch legends in the pulpit to his congregation, and kept and publiſhed accounts of miracles wrought by the relics of ſaints and martyrs. Since the preachers propagated theſe idle tales, it is not wonderful, that the hearers believed them, and that pious lying became the voice of tradition, in ages when any thing might be impoſed on chriſtian auditories, and that which was leaſt underſtood was moſt admired in them, according to the character given of theſe flocks by St. GREGORY of Nazianze in a very remarkable anecdote related by St. JEROM †. But theſe romances had an effect ſtill worſe; for they introduced into chriſtianity a ſort of polytheiſm and idolatry, too nearly akin to heatheniſm. Let not your zeal for the honor of ſaints, martyrs, and confeſſors make you think the expreſſion too hard. I can quote you one much more hard from ERASMUS, for whom you profeſs the ſame veneration that I have. In the preface to DE MARCA, before his paraphraſe on St. PAUL's epiſtles to the Corinthians, after ſaying, that " this apoſtle did not ſuffer any mortal to

* Vid. BAILETT's pref. to the lives of the ſaints.

† Ep. ad NEPOTIAN.

" be

" be cried or preached up, nor the praiſe of the goſpel to be " transferred to men," he adds, " nunc quidem, velut anti- " quato CHRISTO, novum idolatriae genus invehunt, ex homi- " nibus, ut ita loquar, deos facientes." The church, your church I mean, has aſcribed divinity, little if at all better than the heathen did. Some of your ſaints, tho they were not public debauchees, were very ill men: and if you conſult CYPRIAN, whoſe authority is ſo much reſpected, and for the ſame reaſon, by the chriſtian clergy of every ſect, you will find, that they who ſuffered as confeſſors were very often men of the moſt profligate morals. If they were ſuch after their ſufferings, there is room to believe, that ſome of the martyrs were ſuch before they ſuffered, and when they ſuffered.

No monuments can be more uncertain, none more precarious, than thoſe of chriſtian tradition. Other traditions grow more and more ſo by time. Theſe were never more ſo than at firſt. Aſk your acquaintance doctor WATERLAND, whether he has found the tradition of the three firſt ages of the church direct, clear, and uniform in ſupport of the conſubſtantiality of the ſon to the father, which is a doctrine that he defends moſt ſtrenuouſly. He will aſſure you, that he has found it to be ſo. He will not be able, however, to prove it any more than biſhop BULL has done, after all his boaſts of the unanimity of the fathers, and even with the help of forced conſtructions, and indirect proofs. As little will he or any other divine be able to defend, on this authority, ſeveral doctrines, that they hold, or to juſtify themſelves for not holding ſeveral that they reject. Even your divines, who lay ſo much ſtreſs on tradition, are pleaſed to abandon it, as well as ours, in caſes wherein it ſeems to carry the greateſt authority, becauſe it is immediately derived from the apoſtles. Thus, I believe, that abſtinence from blood, which was enjoined as much as abſtinence from fornica-

tion by the apoſtles in a ſolemn council, is at this time required by no doctor, except doctor DELANY. Thus again, there are, I ſuppoſe, very few millenarians left, if even Mr. WHISTON be ſtill of the ſame opinion, tho the year one thouſand ſeven hundred and twenty is paſt, and the millennium not begun. In ſhort, by partial traditions they can prove or diſprove any thing. By univerſal traditions almoſt nothing. This very doctrine of a millennium was oppoſed at the cloſe of the ſecond century *: and a certain prieſt, one CAIUS, who believed, that the apocalypſe aſcribed to St. JOHN was writ by CERINTHUS, aſcribed this opinion not to the evangeliſt, but to the heretic. JEROM, AUSTIN, GREGORY the great, or the ſaint as he is called with leſs reaſon, and divines much more modern than theſe, have interpreted the paſſages of the apocalypſe, that eſtabliſh the millennium, in another ſenſe: and a man, who ſhould profeſs to expect it at this day, or to believe the doctrine, would be treated as a viſionary. But yet we muſt, I think, receive this tradition, ſo generally rejected; or reject all traditions, even thoſe as generally received.

LET me ſay ſomething more, which occurs to me on the ſubject of the millennium. IRENAEUS is a father much quoted and much reſpected. IRENAEUS had ſeen PAPIAS and POLYCARP, and was himſelf a diſciple of the diſciples of St. JOHN. All theſe were millenarians: and thus the firſt authors of apoſtolical traditions taught this doctrine as apoſtolical. JUSTIN the martyr, and TERTULLIAN, were millenarians likewiſe. JUSTIN was the firſt father, I believe, who took notice of the apocalypſe, aſcribed it to St. JOHN, and founded his belief of the millennium upon it, in the dialogue with TRYPHON. TERTULLIAN goes farther. He maintains the apocalypſe againſt the marcionites, and affirms, that the new Jeruſalem, to be

* EUSEB. hiſt. eccleſ. lib. 3.

built

built by the hand of God, and to deſcend from heaven, was known to EZEKIEL, and had been ſeen by the apoſtle St. JOHN; nay, that the plan, or model of it, had been ſeen in his time ſuſpended in the air forty days together, that it might be known again, when it ſhould actually exiſt on the earth. Let it not be ſaid, that I inſiſt on the authorities of a weak man, and of a madman. I might do ſo, in this caſe, with as good reaſon as divines have for inſiſting on them in ſo many others. But the point I inſiſt upon is this. The doctrine of the millennium was an apoſtolical doctrine, and taught as ſuch by the immediate ſucceſſors of the apoſtles. It was oppoſed, indeed, near two centuries afterwards by an obſcure prieſt, who denied it to be the doctrine of St. JOHN, becauſe he denied St. JOHN to be the author of the apocalypſe. But the doctrine was founded on original tradition as well as on the apocalypſe: and therefore whatever interpretations were made of theſe revelations in after times, the tradition was too freſh to be ſhaken. What ſhall we ſay now? Were the traditions concerning the millennium of doubtful authority in the firſt ages of the church? In that caſe, tradition is no rule at all. Were they uniform? How comes this doctrine to be exploded?

THE third and fourth ways, that is the two worſt, of preſerving doctrines, which BARROW mentions, have ſo near a relation to one another, that one is the neceſſary conſequence of the other. They, who decide about diſputable and diſputed facts or doctrines, at great diſtances of time, may be eaſily impoſed upon by tradition, and may eaſily impoſe by authority. Tradition is all that time growing corrupt. If it become falſe, they decide and they write falſely; if uncertain, uncertainly. The nicaean council decided againſt ARIUS: and yet, if we give credit to PETAVIUS, whom it was more eaſy to ſilence by authority, than to refute by fact and by rea-

ſon, the fathers of the three firſt centuries were little better than arians. How came the fathers of the fourth to decree ſo poſitively and ſo preciſely in favor of a conſubſtantiality, about which the tradition had been neither poſitive, preciſe, nor unanimous; tho biſhop BULL has ventured to aſſert, that the antenicaean fathers had agreed on this ſubject, "ad unum." Could any man, who had not the front of a controverſial writer, affirm in this manner, when he knew, as BULL knew, that eighty fathers who condemned PAUL of Samoſata, denied the homoüſion or conſubſtantiality of the ſon with the father?

WILL it be urged, that the four goſpels are as old, and even older than tradition; that the orthodox doctrine concerning the trinity is eſtabliſhed in them, and in the other ſcriptures of the new Teſtament, by all which tradition is to be controuled and corrected? I apprehend, that the anſwer will not be ſufficient. Some will aſſert, that the ſcriptures, far from eſtabliſhing the nicaean doctrine, vindicate, by their whole tenor, the ſupremacy of the father, and declare the ſubordination of the ſon. But let it be, that the goſpels received into the canon are favorable to the orthodox belief; how do we know, that the other goſpels were exactly conformable to theſe, on a matter of ſo much nice definition? Might not our learned and ſubtile theology find the taſk infinitely harder, if we had thoſe goſpels, to create an harmony between three or four dozen, than between four? The council of Laödicea admitted four, and rejected all the reſt. But it is very poſſible, that this council might proceed, as councils have generally done, under the influence of an eccleſiaſtical faction, and decree accordingly; or elſe on ſome ſuch reaſons as IRENAEUS called a demonſtration *. There are four parts of the world. There are four cardinal winds. There have been four covenants under ADAM, NOAH,

* Lib. 3.

MOSES,

Moses, and Christ. There can be but four goſpels therefore. I omit ſome other proofs, juſt as demonſtrative as thoſe, upon all of which he did, and the council might, determine that there could be neither more nor leſs than four goſpels; tho ſeveral traditions authoriſed ſeveral others.

The truth is, that as every man, in the moſt early days of chriſtianity, judged of his own inſpiration, and of the gifts of the ſpirit he received, ſo every church judged of the inſpiration of authors, and of the divine authority of books. The firſt led to the laſt, and thoſe authors were deemed inſpired, and thoſe books were canoniſed, in which every particular church found the greateſt conformity with her own ſentiments. It is aſtoniſhing to conſider how far this extravagance was carried. To conſider, for inſtance, that Clement of Alexandria ſhould look on an apocalypſe of Peter as genuine, and it ſhould be rejected afterwards. That St. Paul ſhould inſert in his epiſtles ſeveral paſſages of the apocalypſe of Elias, as Origen aſſures that he did, and it ſhould be refuſed admittance into the canon. But it is ſtill more aſtoniſhing to obſerve how much reſpect Origen himſelf had for the viſions of Hermas, and the oracles of the Sybil, as well as others of the fathers. Irenaeus, having cited the former, uſes this expreſſion, "ſcrip-" tura pronunciavit*:" and honeſt Justin, in his admonition to the Greeks, exhorts them in a moſt ſolemn manner to believe the antient and venerable Sibyl, who was extraordinarily inſpired by almighty God.

I conclude from the little that has been ſaid on a moſt voluminous ſubject, that as tradition furniſhes very precarious anecdotes to thoſe who write at great diſtances of time, ſo it may become difficult, nay impoſſible, to aſcertain the autho-

* Lib. 4.

rity

rity even of books that were written, perhaps, at the time they ſuppoſe themſelves to have been written, if the attempt to fix their authenticity, and to reduce them into a canon, is made at a great diſtance of time. They may be neither received nor rejected on grounds abſolutely ſure. They may be rejected at one time, and received at another: a remarkable example of which we find in the adventures of the apocalypſe. Whether this book was writ by JOHN the evangeliſt, JOHN the prieſt, CERINTHUS, or ſome other viſionary, it paſſed for a compoſition of the evangeliſt's, and maintained great credit as ſuch in the church for ſome centuries before the council of Laödicea. This council left it out of the canon in the year three hundred and ſixty: and altho aſiatic biſhops might paſs, in this caſe, for judges more competent than thoſe of the weſt, the council of Carthage put it into the canon in the year three hundred and ninety ſeven. Some ſpaniſh councils, and others, I believe, in the weſt did the ſame. Anathema, that convincing argument, was employed againſt all gainſayers: and as the miſt thickened, it was univerſally admitted into the canon of the new Teſtament.

To ſum up the whole in one ſhort propoſition. Eccleſiaſtical tradition has been, from the firſt and pureſt ages, founded, for the moſt part, in ignorance, ſuperſtition, enthuſiaſm, and fraud. He who pretends to clear the reverend fathers, by whom tradition was principally conveyed down from age to age, and to deny this charge, muſt be very ignorant himſelf, or very impudent. Sometimes they ſhew their learning, like JUSTIN, who took the inſcription "SEMONI deo ſan-"cto," on the ſtatue of a god of the Sabines, for an inſcription on the ſtatue of SIMON the magician. Sometimes their logic, and the ſtrength of their reaſoning talents are extremely like to thoſe of IRENAEUS, in his famous demonſtration of the neceſſity of four goſpels. Sometimes they are as ſober as CYPRIAN,

PRIAN, who rehearſed to his church in the morning the viſions and dreams he had in the night, and who conſulted little children in their extaſies, when he had none of theſe himſelf *. Sometimes

* As extraordinary as this may ſeem, it will not ſurpriſe thoſe who have read the confeſſion, aſcribed to him, and publiſhed among his works in the benedictine edition of them. The great St. CYPRIAN, for ſo our divines, as well as yours, affect to call him, had been a rhetorician before his converſion, and was after it an admirer of his countryman, TERTULLIAN, whom he called his maſter, and ſome portion of whoſe works he uſed to read every day, according to an anecdote mentioned by St. JEROM [a]. Now ſince he formed his ſtyle on this model, and on the taſte of his age, we may well expect to find what is found in his writings, much hyperbole, much ſpiritual bombaſt, and all the flowers of falſe eloquence. We find them very eminently in that extraordinary piece, his confeſſion. There he gives an account of his education, of his initiation into all the myſteries of paganiſm, and of his admiſſion into all the ſecrets of the blackeſt and moſt diabolical magic. Believe me, ſays the ſaint, I ſaw the devil himſelf; believe me, I embraced him, I converſed with him, and was eſteemed one of thoſe who held a principal rank about him. He adds, that the devil made him many compliments and promiſes, gave him a band of infernal ſpirits to command, and at the end of this firſt viſit aroſe from his throne, and accompanied the young JAMBRES with a politeneſs that ſurpriſed all thoſe who ſaw it. He deſcribes his perſon, his dreſs, and the ſpirits that attended his court, in material forms, with which they were ſupplied by the ſteams of ſacrifices. He deſcribes afterwards the wonderful feats he performed, whilſt he was a magician, and all the abominations of which he was guilty. But finding at laſt that the devil, and all the powers of hell had not been able to debauch JUSTINA, a chriſtian virgin, for whom his friend AGLAIDAS had a ſtrong inclination, and whom CYPRIAN himſelf ſeems to have liked very much, he renounced the devil and all his works. He ſet him even at defiance. You tremble, ſaid the ſaint, at the name of CHRIST: the ſign of his croſs deprives you of all power: how would you ſtand his preſence? Thus the devil was put to confuſion. But CYPRIAN fell into deſpair, till his friend, EUSEBIUS, comforted him, carried him to the biſhop, and made him not only a Chriſtian, but one of the greateſt lights of the church.

SOME divines would find, in all this, no reaſon to object to CYPRIAN's authority. On the contrary, they would exalt this confeſſion, and the public ſhame which the penitent took to himſelf, as an illuſtrious proof of the ſincerity of his converſion. Such divines might, perhaps, go farther, and ſhew, by way of corollary, not only againſt the novatians, that chriſtians who had apoſtatiſed might be received to repentance, but alſo that the moſt wicked of pagans might become a ſaint. They would not, however, be able to ſolve this dilemma. "Either CYPRIAN believed "what he reported to be true, or he knew it to be falſe. If he believed it true, he "was a madman. If he knew it to be falſe, he was a liar; and neither in one cha- "racter, nor in the other, a fit paſtor for the flock of CHRIST."

[a] Lib. de ſcrip. eccleſiaſt.

OTHER

times they are as ſagacious as AMBROSE, who had viſions and dreams too, and who had beſides them the faculty of diſtinguiſhing

OTHER divines, both of your church, and of mine, are very unwilling to own that this confeſſion is CYPRIAN's. They would gladly father it on ſome other perſon, no matter on whom. His writings do not only give, like thoſe of the other fathers, a ſeeming authority to many of the doctrines that they teach; but he was in particular a zealous aſſertor of the dignity and power of biſhops, and of the whole eccleſiaſtical order. The papiſts, indeed, have moſt uſe for this father: and his book "de unitate eccleſiae" alone, nay, one ſingle paſſage of it would ſuffice to make him a favorite in the church of Rome. The paſſage I mean is that wherein, after he has quoted the words of CHRIST to PETER [a], tho he acknowledges that all the apoſtles received the ſame powers, he adds [b], "tamen ut unitatem manifeſtaret, "unitatis ejuſdem originem ab uno incipientem ſuâ authoritate diſpoſuit —— ſed "exordium ab unitate proficiſcitur, et primatus PETRO datur, ut una CHRISTI ec-"cleſia, et cathedra una monſtretur." The reputation of ſuch a witneſs in favor of papal primacy, and epiſcopal authority, in the middle of the third century, is to be ſupported at any rate; and by conſequence this piece is not to be aſcribed to him, if the prieſthood can hinder it, by oppoſing the moſt improbable, to the moſt probable reaſons.

WE know nothing of the man till he became a Chriſtian. St. Auſtin [c] indeed ſpeaks of him, as if he had read his confeſſion. "Mutatus eſt CYPRIANUS," ſays this ſaint of his countryman, "cujus hodie memoriam frequentamus —— ipſe ſcribit, "ipſe teſtatur cujus vitae fuerit aliquando, quam nefariae, quam impiae, quam impro-"bandae, ac deteſtandae." The author of the confeſſion could almoſt alone deſerve ſuch epithets: and it is extremely probable that PONTIUS, a prudent deacon, and the antient biographer of CYPRIAN, paſſed over in ſilence all that preceded his converſion, as if it had been unworthy to be mentioned, but in truth that he might not be obliged to ſay any thing of this important confeſſion. His modern biographer, a benedictine monk, who publiſhed the edition of CYPRIAN's works, which BALUZIUS had begun, is not ſo eaſily embarraſſed. He pretends that there were two CYPRIANS, the great St. CYPRIAN of Carthage, and a little St. CYPRIAN of Antioch, whoſe name is likewiſe preſerved in eccleſiaſtical monuments. He inſiſts on a poem, which PHOTIUS reports that the empreſs EUDOCIA wrote about a CYPRIAN and a JUSTINA who ſuffered martyrdom at Nicomedia, and which contained many things that are imputed to the CYPRIAN we ſpeak of, by St. GREGORY of Nazianze in his eighteenth ſermon, tho they could not belong to him. On this foundation the monk aſſumes that St. GREGORY confounded the antiochian with the carthaginian CYPRIAN, and did not know on whoſe feſtival he preached. Our learned FELL had objected that no one of this name is to be found among the biſhops of Antioch: no wonder, ſays the learned benedictine, for as there were two CYPRIANS, there were two Antiochs, the great Antioch ſo famous in hiſtory, and a little private Antioch concealed in Phoenicia, and ſcarce heard of in any public records. It

[a] MAT. c. xvi. [b] JOH. c. xx. [c] Serm. 311.

ſeemed

guiſhing the relics of ſaints and martyrs by certain emotions that they cauſed in him. Sometimes they are as cautious and exact, in their reports of miracles, as AUSTIN was, who ſays on that important queſtion, whether St. JOHN died or not, "that the "people of Epheſus, men of ſenſe, and not light of belief, had "aſſured him, that the ſaint was buried in their town; but "that he lay in his grave like one who ſleeps in his bed, and "that the earth which covered him roſe and ſunk, as the bed-"clothes do over one who ſleeps and breathes." To conclude, they were ſometimes as ſincere and honeſt as JEROM. The ſincerity of this great doctor may be ſeen in this inſtance. He pretended that angels had ſcourged him ſeverely for his attachment to profane authors; and to ſhew that he had not dreamed it, he appealed to the marks that remained on his back *. His honeſty may be ſeen in this. The fathers were apt to imploy, like rhetors, falſe reaſons and falſe authorities. JEROM commends the practice, avows it, and gives rules for it. Nay he makes PETER and PAUL guilty of it in their famous diſpute, which gave occaſion to another between him and the biſhop of Hippo.

IF we were obliged to ſearch for the articles and grounds of faith, and for the meaſures of obedience, in this myſtery of folly and iniquity; if we were to collect our chriſtianity from dark paſſages of ſcripture, that admit often of no ſenſe, and

ſeemed incredible to FELL that St. GREGORY, who had been ſo well inſtructed in eccleſiaſtical affairs by his pious father, and who had been at Nicomedia and in the neighbouring country, ſhould know nothing of this antiochian CYPRIAN, but apply the whole of this confeſſion to the carthaginian. It will avail little, I ſuppoſe, to affirm that GREGORY was come newly to Conſtantinople, and that he preached without ſufficient preparation and information: ſo that I may continue to believe, as I do believe, it more probable that theſe critics go about to deceive us, than that St. GREGORY was deceived himſelf, and impoſed on his auditory.

* Ep. ad EUSTOCHIUM.

often of ſeveral, and that are rendered more uncertain and obſcure by eccleſiaſtical traditions, and by ſuch divines as have been mentioned, our caſe would be bad indeed. But ſuch an abſurdity cannot be in the order of an all-wiſe providence. God has dealed more graciouſly with his creatures. The kingdom of theology is the kingdom of darkneſs: and to enjoy the true light of the goſpel, we muſt fly from it. To believe that JESUS was the Meſſiah is ſaid by ſome to be the "unum neceſſarium" of faith; but to obſerve the laws of nature is certainly the "unum neceſſarium" of duty. About this ſummary of faith and duty there can be no very reaſonable doubt. Scripture, tradition, and theology, all conſpire to eſtabliſh them; altho the two laſt endeavour to add to them, and to perplex them.

SECTION XX.

BUT it is time we ſhould proceed to the laſt cauſe I aſſigned of the multiplication of ſects, and the confuſion of doctrines, which have rendered theology the corruption of religion and the bane of ſociety, by the abuſe which a diſtinct order of men has made of religion to acquire dominion over private conſcience, and by that ſpiritual, a great ſhare of temporal, dominion in every chriſtian ſtate. With this I ſhall conclude all I have to ſay concerning authority in matters of religion, and ſhall plead the cauſe of it, ſucceſsfully, I hope, againſt thoſe infidels who charge it unjuſtly.

THAT religion is neceſſary to ſtrengthen, and that it contributes to ſupport government cannot be denied, I think, without contradicting reaſon and experience both. This ſome men have been extravagant enough to do directly: whilſt others, with

with whom we ſhall meddle here, have contradicted reaſon and experience, juſt as much, in a manner more likely to impoſe, and therefore more likely to do hurt, by propagating falſe conceptions of the Supreme Being, by perplexing the notions of religion, and by aſſociating to it ſuch as are really diſtinct from it. From hence all the evil conſequences, that are imputed to religion, have flowed immediately: and it is neceſſary, therefore, in defence of it, to diſtinguiſh clearly between what is really religion, and what has been induſtriouſly, and is now habitually, confounded with it, and made to paſs for it.

Civil obligations are impoſed by the laws of man; religious obligations by thoſe of God; and as the authority of the legiſlator is far greater in one caſe than in the other, ſo is the ſanction of the law, eternal puniſhments in another life, inſtead of temporal pains and penalties in this. If it be ſaid, that beſides this difference, we are to conſider how much religion has a farther influence than civil government can have, becauſe the former reaches to the inward diſpoſitions of the heart and mind, whilſt the other goes no farther than to regulate outward conduct; I ſhall neither deny the propoſition, nor admit all the uſe that is made of it: but I ſhall conclude from thence, how neceſſary it is to the peace and welfare of mankind, that they be kept from jarring, which cannot be effectually prevented, unleſs the intire power of both remains in the ſame hands. As long as natural religion is alone concerned, this ſhould not ſeem ſo difficult; but when revealed religions are eſtabliſhed, the difficulty becomes almoſt inſuperable. The principles and duties of natural religion ariſe from the nature of things, and are diſcovered by the reaſon of man, according to that order which the author of all nature, and the giver of all reaſon, has eſtabliſhed in the human ſyſtem. From hence too would ariſe the inſtitutions of civil government, in a natural ſtate; if the

minds of legiſlators were not corrupted previouſly by ſuperſtition. In theſe caſes, religion and civil government, ariſing from the ſame ſpring, their waters would be intermixed, they would run in one ſtream, and they might be eaſily confined to the ſame channel; if revelation did not introduce myſterious doctrines and rites, which it becomes ſoon a trade to teach and to celebrate.

NEITHER nature, nor reaſon, could ever lead men to imagine two diſtinct and independent ſocieties in the ſame ſociety. This imagination was broached by eccleſiaſtical ambition; and when it was once broached, it was ſure to be propagated by the ſelf-intereſt of a whole order of men in every country, and by the ſuperſtition of all the reſt. A reſpect for religion begat a reſpect for this order. The idea of religion came to be aſſociated to that of church, or rather to be confounded with it, and church came to ſignify this order of men even excluſively. This church, this religious ſociety, grew up in ſome countries to be the tyrant, in others to be the rival of the ſtate on the authority of pretended revelations among the heathens: and it is a melancholy truth, that the ſame monſtrous growth has been ſeen and felt, on the pretended authority of real revelations among Chriſtians. Such is the knavery and ſuch the folly of mankind, that no example, antient nor modern, pagan nor chriſtian, can be produced of ſuch an order of men once eſtabliſhed that has not aimed at acquiring from their inſtitution, and that has not acquired, ſooner or later, immoderate wealth and exorbitant power.

FEW men are ſo little acquainted with the hiſtory of the chriſtian world as not to know, that the wealth of this church is equal, at leaſt in many countries, to that of the egyptian church; that the influence of the antient could not be greater than

than that of the modern magi over all ranks of men; and that the biſhop of Rome has exerciſed, even over kings in many countries, a power which he claimed, in all, of the ſame nature with that of the ethiopian church over kings of one country.

A RELIGIOUS ſociety, by which is meaned, on this occaſion, a clergy, is, or is not the creature of the ſtate. If the firſt, it follows, that this order, no more than others, which the ſtate has inſtituted for the maintenance of good government, can aſſume any rights, or exerciſe any powers, except ſuch as the ſtate has thought fit to attribute to it; and that the ſtate may, and ought to keep a conſtant controul over it, not only to prevent uſurpations and abuſes, but to direct the public and private influence of the clergy in a ſtrict conformity to the letter and ſpirit of that conſtitution, the ſervants of which, in a much truer ſenſe they are, than what they affect ſometimes to call themſelves, the ambaſſadors of God to other men. If the laſt is ſaid, if it is aſſerted, that the church is in any ſort independent on the ſtate, there ariſes from this pretenſion the greateſt abſurdity imaginable, that I mean of "imperium in imperio:" an empire of divine in an empire of human inſtitution. It is in truth ſo expreſſly contained in the very terms of the aſſertion, that none of the tedious ſophiſtical reaſonings, which have been employed for the purpoſe, can evade or diſguiſe it.

ONE of theſe I will mention, becauſe it has a certain air of plauſibility, that impoſes on many, and becauſe, if it cannot ſtand a ſhort and fair examination, as I think it cannot, the whole edifice of eccleſiaſtical independency and grandeur falls to the ground. It has been ſaid then, that religious and civil ſocieties are widely diſtinguiſhed by the diſtinct ends of their inſtitutions, which imply neceſſarily diſtinct powers and a mu-

a mutual independency; that the end of one is the ſalvation of ſouls, and that of the other the ſecurity of temporal intereſts; that the ſtate puniſhes overt-acts, and can puniſh nothing elſe, becauſe it can have cogniſance of nothing that paſſes in the mind and does not brea kout into criminal actions; but that the church imploying her influence to temper the paſſions, to regulate the inward diſpoſitions, and to prevent ſins, as well as crimes, is that tribunal at which even intentions are to be tried, and ſins, that do not ripen into crimes, nor immediately affect civil ſociety, are to be puniſhed.

Now in anſwer to all this we may deny, with truth and reaſon on our ſide, that the avowed ends of religious, and the real ends of civil ſocieties, are ſo diſtinct as to require diſtinct powers, and a mutual independency. The ſalvation of ſouls is not the immediate end of civil government: and I wiſh it was not rather the pretence than the end of eccleſiaſtical policy. But if to abſtain from evil, and to do good works, be means of ſalvation, the means of ſalvation are objects of civil government. It is the duty of princes and magiſtrates to promote a ſtrict obſervation of the law of nature, of private and public morality, and to make thoſe who live in ſubjection to them good men, in order to make them good citizens. For this purpoſe, the balance and the ſword are put into their hands, that they may meaſure out puniſhment to every one who injures the community, or does wrong to his neighbour; and a rigorous puniſhment of crimes, eſpecially if it be accompanied with rewards and encouragements to virtue, for both are entruſted to the ſame men, is the ſureſt way, not only to reform the outward behavior, but to create an habitual inward diſpoſition to the practice of religion.

A CLERGY

A CLERGY might co-operate with the civil magiſtrates, very uſefully no doubt, by exhortations and reproofs, whereof they are ſeldom ſparing, and much more by example, which can alone give efficacy to the former, and which is not, however, very frequently imployed. This they might do as aſſiſtants to the civil magiſtrate, in concert with him, and in ſubordination to him. To what purpoſe, therefore, do they claim and affect independency on him? Greater power never did, nor can enable them to do greater good. On the contrary, it always has, and always muſt divert them from the proper buſineſs of their profeſſion, create ſcandalous ſtriſe with the civil power, and embarraſs the whole order of government. Would they erect a tribunal to puniſh intentions? The very pretence is impertinent. Would they erect it to puniſh, where no injury is offered, nor wrong done? The deſign is unjuſt and arbitrary. The ideas of crimes are determinate and fixed. The magiſtrate cannot alter them. The ideas of ſins are more confuſed and vague; and we know by long and general experience how they vary in the minds, or at leaſt in the writings of caſuiſts. Would they erect ſuch a tribunal to try the orthodoxy of men's faith? Such an one is erected, in ſome countries, under the name of the inquiſition, and is juſtly deteſted in all. A tribunal, with all the powers of the inquiſition, may extirpate hereſy, or rather propagate hypocriſy, by the moſt abominable ſpecies of tyranny. A tribunal of this ſort, that has powers leſs coercive, may teaze, and vex, and irritate mankind. It may multiply ſects, render them more obſtinate by perſecution, and bring all thoſe evils on the world which atheiſts object to religion: but the former can never procure a real, nor the latter even an apparent uniformity. To what end and purpoſe then can ſpiritual courts, and coercive powers attributed to the clergy, ſerve, unleſs it be to make them judges and parties

ties in their own cauſe, when matters of intereſt are concerned?

SECTION XXI.

I INSIST on this point the more, not only becauſe it leads directly to what I ſhall have occaſion to ſay in the latter part of this eſſay, but becauſe I would take off the maſk of eccleſiaſtical ambition, which even ſome of our own divines put on. Thoſe of your church have laid it aſide long ago, and contend openly for eccleſiaſtical tyranny. The principal difference among them ſeems to be, whether this tyranny ſhall be that of a monarchy, or of an ariſtocracy. Honeſt LAUD went as far, at leaſt, as the moſt moderate of yours, and was frank enough to own his principles and aims. The ſeveral revolutions that have happened in our church and ſtate have rendered the firſt too unpopular, to be directly avowed, and the latter too viſibly impracticable, to be entertained. The bait, however, is tempting, and therefore even they nibble at it, who fear the hook. What they are not ſuffered to attempt in practice, they maintain in ſpeculation: they inſinuate principles, which may ſerve to re-eſtabliſh eccleſiaſtical power and independency on the ſtate, in ſome more happy conjuncture; and they do all this ſafely, whilſt ſeeming modifications, and ambiguous expreſſions, hinder moſt men from diſcerning the conſequences of what they advance, and ſome even from knowing again in their writings the ſame doctrines that they had condemned in the writings of others.

AMONG all the fallacies which have been imployed by churchmen, who have thought it neceſſary to ſoften the abſurdity, and to anticipate objections, one of the moſt abſurd has been,

been advanced, tho not invented, by a paradoxical acquaintance of yours; and it is to maintain the independency of the church, and to ſuppoſe, at the ſame time, a ſort of original contract between the church and the ſtate, the terms of which every whimſical writer, even this ſcribler, adjuſts as he pleaſes. They who contend for abſolute monarchy in the ſtate endeavour to explode the notion of an original contract between the prince and the people, becauſe the terms of it are eaſy to be aſcertained. They know, thoſe of them at leaſt who are not as mad as FILMER know, that all the rights and powers which a prince can have muſt be derived originally from the people. They know, therefore, that the terms of ſuch a contract, generally made, and always implied, may be ſufficiently aſcertained by reaſon, by law, and by cuſtom, notwithſtanding any previous and divine right, which it may be ſuppoſed, that princes have to govern. They know too, that the whole body of the people, and no particular order of men, are to judge of the obſervation of this contract. But they who contend for the independency of the church on the ſtate are ready to aſſume ſuch a contract, becauſe the pretence may ſerve to delude the ſtate, in ſome countries, and can never embarraſs the church in any. By admitting it, the ſtate acknowledges an original independency in the church, derived from a greater authority than her own: and the ſuppoſed terms of union may be conſtrued to be rather conceſſions of the religious ſociety to the civil, for the ſake of order and peace, than grants of the civil to the religious ſociety. Thus religion and the church are ſet on the ſame foot: no human authority can alter one, but muſt receive it in the terms in which it has been revealed; and ſo may a good caſuiſt prove, on this hypotheſis, that no human authority can meaſure out any conditions of eſtabliſhment to the other. Thus the ſtate becomes nothing better than a coordinate, but inferior power.

THE ſtupid fellow, who advanced this paradox in engliſh, did not ſee how ill the parts of it hang together; nor that if eccleſiaſtical government was, by divine appointment, independent of civil, no ſuch contract, as he ſuppoſes, could be made. The religious ſociety, notwithſtanding their known moderation, could not have parted from that independency and ſuperiority over the civil power, which God had given them. But the truth is, they were glad to get an eſtabliſhment in the empire at any rate: and when a fortunate conjuncture had made one emperor think, that they might be of uſe to him, it happened, as it often has happened, that the auxiliaries uſurped on him, or his ſucceſſors at leaſt, on the prerogatives of the crown, and on the liberties of the people. In ſhort, if there had been any alliance between the church and the ſtate on this occaſion, it muſt have been ſuch an alliance as never was heard of before nor ſince. It muſt have been an alliance without any treaty, for there certainly was none: and all the advantages, which the religious ſociety acquired afterwards over the civil were mere uſurpations; for uſurpations by fraud are as really ſuch, as uſurpations by force, and theſe were carried as far as legiſlative authority.

THE church advocates beyond the Alpes may be a little more impudent, but they are much more conſiſtent than ſome on this ſide. That voluminous compilation of decrees of councils and of popes, of reſolutions of fathers, of apoſtolical conſtitutions, and of other eccleſiaſtical authorities, compoſes a body of law, according to them, which the church had a right to enact without the concurrence of the ſtate, and which is, however, obligatory on the ſtate, and on every member of the ſtate, as far as they are concerned in it. This, I ſay, is impudent; but it is conſiſtent with the notion of a religious ſociety

of

of divine inſtitution, and therefore independent, and may be eaſily defended on that principle. But where we ſhall look for the conditions of that original contract, which was made between the religious and the civil ſociety, I know not; unleſs we ſuppoſe them written on the back of CONSTANTINE's grant to SYLVESTER, and preſerved in that grand repertory of forgeries, the records of the roman church. We ſhall not find them in the canon law. The French, as good papiſts as they are, admit this in part only: and the quarrel between PHILIP LE BEL and BONIFACE the eighth may be ſaid to ſubſiſt even now. We, who have ſhook off the roman yoke entirely, admit ſtill leſs of this eccleſiaſtical code; for we reject every thing in it, that is not conformable to the law of the ſtate, and to the doctrines of the church, which this law has eſtabliſhed.

THIS imaginary contract, in ſhort, whether well or ill made, never exiſted, at any time, nor in any country; tho to have been real, and really authoriſed, it ſhould have been the ſame, at all times and in all countries, where chriſtianity was propagated. Political ſocieties make, and alter, and break their alliances, as the varying reaſon of ſtate ſuggeſts. Different orders of civil government, in the ſame ſociety, change, and with them the whole conſtitution of ſuch governments, as reaſon or paſſion, the intereſts or diſpoſitions of men determine them. But a religion given by God is in it's nature invariable: and therefore, if a religious ſociety, with certain privileges, immunities and prerogatives, be neceſſary to preſerve it ſo, the order and conſtitution of ſuch a ſociety muſt be invariable too. The church muſt be eſtabliſhed by the ſame divine authority as the religion, and be by conſequence independent on the ſtate. But nothing of this kind has been. CHRIST's kingdom was not of this world. He ſent out his apoſtles to teach and to baptiſe, and the utmoſt power he gave them, beſides that of

working miracles to convince and to convert, was to ſhake off the duſt of their feet, and to proteſt againſt the infidelity of thoſe, who refuſed to receive them and the goſpel they publiſhed. The apoſtles ordained others to accompany and to ſucceed them in the ſame office, the office of teaching and baptiſing. The apoſtles could give no more power than they received; and no argument of right can be drawn from any thing that paſſed, nor from any thing that theſe men did, for the maintenance of their ſect, whilſt chriſtianity was a ſect. As little argument of right, or of independency, can be drawn from the impolitic indulgence of civil governments, that embracing the religion admitted the teachers of it into a legal eſtabliſhment, with all the extraordinary powers they had enjoyed, whilſt they were leaders and heads of a ſect. I call it indulgence, becauſe the religious ſociety had no original right to any ſuch powers; becauſe the ſect could not preſcribe in ſuch caſes to the ſtate; and becauſe they were not admitted by any treaty, but by the good will and ſole authority of the civil government. I call this indulgence impolitic, becauſe it encouraged eccleſiaſtical ambition, laid the foundation of all the uſurpations of the church on the ſtate, deſtroyed the effect of religion by theology, and made even chriſtianity a grievance, as will be ſhewn immediately.

SECTION XXII.

CHRISTIANITY had not been eſtabliſhed many centuries in the weſt, before a claim to univerſal property was ſet on foot in favor of the faithful, that is of Chriſtians; nor before the biſhop of Rome claimed univerſal empire, not only over the religious, but over all civil ſocieties. St. AUSTIN ſhall vouch for what I advance here on the firſt head, and what I ſay on the

the ſecond has public notoriety for its voucher. The ſaint in a letter to MACEDONIUS *, takes notice of a paſſage in the proverbs of SOLOMON †, which runs to this effect in the ſeptuagint verſion. "To the faithful man belongs a whole world of "riches; to the infidel or unfaithful, not even a farthing §." What ſenſe the paſſage may receive, I inquire not: but this is the comment of St. AUSTIN upon it. "We have a property "in that which we poſſeſs of right; we poſſeſs of right what "we poſſeſs juſtly; we poſſeſs juſtly what we poſſeſs well; "whatever is ill poſſeſſed therefore belongs to another; but he "poſſeſſes a thing ill, who makes an ill uſe of it." On this admirable foundation, the good biſhop eſtabliſhes the right of ſuch ſaints as himſelf, "fideles et pii quorum jure ſunt omnia," to the property of the whole world. The right is in them, tho the iniquity of the unrighteous poſſeſſors be tolerated. "To-"leratur iniquitas malè habentium, et quaedam inter eos jura "conſtituuntur quae appellantur civilia." This however he is willing to connive at for the ſake of preſent expediency, inſtead of inſiſting on an immediate ceſſion of all this wealth, or on an actual repeal of all the laws of civil government. His words are ſo gracious that they deſerve to be quoted. "Sed tamen "etiam hic non intercedimus, ut ſecundum mores legeſque ter-"renas non reſtituantur aliena &c." I believe this great doctor of the church appears to you, as he does to me, a caſuiſt fit for VENNER and the tribe of the fifth monarchy: and I cannot perſuade my ſelf that he was ſo inconſiſtent as to refuſe any eſtates, or other donations, that were offered to the church, or to reſtore any that had been given, tho it has been aſſerted, I remember not on what authority, that he did ſo.

* Ep. 54. ed. Baſil. † Prov. xvii. 6.

§ Fidelis hominis totus mundus divitiarum eſt, infidelis autem nec obolus.

THUS

THUS early, and thus violently, did a ſpirit of avarice poſſeſs the religious ſociety: and we may eaſily conceive what a ſpirit of ſtupid bigotry and implicit reſignation poſſeſſed the laity at the ſame time, when a little biſhop of Hippo durſt advance ſuch doctrines as I have quoted to ſuch a man as MACEDONIUS. He might be encouraged to make the claim by the practice of the firſt Chriſtians; for among them, all things were in common; the rich ſold their poſſeſſions, and laid the whole price at the feet of the apoſtles. I ſay the whole price, and I add, that it was ſtrictly exacted, as we may aſſure ourſelves from the example of ANANIAS and his wife SAPHIRA *. They might have kept their eſtate, or the whole price they had ſold it for. But when they brought it, in imitation of the zeal of other Chriſtians, to the apoſtolical chamber or treaſury, it became a fraud to keep back any part of it. Leſs than the whole would not ſatisfy the church: and St. PETER accuſes them accordingly of fraud, and of lying to the holy ghoſt; becauſe they had given no more than they could ſpare, and had owned no more than they had given. The puniſhment followed inſtantly: they were both ſtruck dead. It appears that great collections were made, and every church had a common purſe. By theſe means they ſupported their poor: and every man who embraced chriſtianity, being ſure not to want bread, the goſpel was more effectually propagated, and great numbers of the loweſt rank of people were brought into the pale. Another pious uſe of eccleſiaſtical wealth was to maintain the fathers and miniſters of the word. We ſee, by St. PAUL's epiſtles, that they were ſo maintained in their ſeveral miſſions; and this apoſtle, in writing to the Corinthians, when he diſtinguiſhes himſelf from others, and values himſelf above them on many accounts, inſiſts particularly on this, that he had preached gratis, and

* Acts c. v.

taken

taken nothing from them. He had a trade, and he maintained himſelf by it; for which reaſon ERASMUS calls him, as I remember, "coriarius pontifex," the leather dreſſing pontiff.

IT was not zeal alone that brought an immenſe wealth to the church, even in the firſt centuries. An opinion that the end of the world was near, made the rich more indifferent to riches, that they were not to enjoy long, or that were not to remain long in their families. This opinion the clergy promoted: and the laity was ſo ſilly as not to ſee, that if it was not worth their while to keep their eſtates, it was not worth the while of churchmen to be ſo ſolicitous to acquire them. The end of the world ſeemed to be fixed at the diſtance of about two hundred years, in the beginning of the fourth century, according to LACTANTIUS *, who wrote at that time: and yet this motive had ſuch effect, in conjunction with a multitude of other artifices employed by the religious ſociety to the ſame purpoſe, that in this very century a law to reſtrain eccleſiaſtics from obtaining donations and wills in their favor was become neceſſary. Not only VALENTINIAN and GRATIAN, but even THEODOSIUS, made edicts for this purpoſe: and the practice of inveigling weak people, devout women particularly, to defraud their right heirs, and to give their eſtates to the church, was ſo public, ſo frequent, and ſo infamous, that the church, who had permiſſion to hold theſe eſtates, thought it prudent to ſubmit to ſome appearance of reſtraint in acquiring them. I ſay appearance of reſtraint, becauſe we may conclude that means were found of evading this very reſtraint, from the experience of our own age; and becauſe it is fair to conclude that none were neglected of heaping up wealth in thoſe ages, when biſhops themſelves were the greateſt uſurers. This wealth was

* Omnis expectatio non amplius quam ducentorum videtur annorum. Inſtit. l. 7. c. 25.

ſuch

ſuch that it proved a principal cauſe of the perſecutions of the church, as father PAUL obſerves *, from the reign of COMMODUS: and we know that DECIUS, who was a great and a good prince, as princes went in thoſe days, and as they go in ours, attempted nothing more at firſt, than many chriſtian princes have executed. He attempted to ſeize the treaſure of the church at Rome. LAWRENCE, a deacon of that church, broke his meaſures. He put LAWRENCE to death, and the ſeventh perſecution began on that occaſion; for which his memory has been perſecuted by chriſtian writers; as that of CHARLES MARTEL has been by the monks, who ſent him to hell for taking ſome of the wealth of the church, to defend both the church and the ſtate againſt the Saracens.

ABUNDANCE of matter offers itſelf to us on this head. But the immenſe wealth of the clergy, their inſatiable thirſt after it, the uſurpations and other ſcandalous methods by which they acquired it, and the no leſs ſcandalous uſe they made of it, are now ſo well known, that it would be loſs of time to enter into any great detail on the ſubject. A general obſervation or two will be ſufficient for our purpoſe. Biſhops found pretences and means of taking to their own uſe the revenues that had been appropriated to the poor, the churches, and the inferior clergy, as well as to them; and left the charge of maintaining all theſe on the laity, who had provided for them once already. The laity were ſo ſimple as to take the charge upon them, inſtead of obliging theſe lords of the religious ſociety to keep to the original appropriation. Hence aroſe the divine right of tithes, and a multitude of other exactions. But if the laity thought that their pockets were to be picked no more, they were ſoon undeceived. The ſecular clergy, living no longer in communities, gave more public ſcandal, and became leſs

* Hiſt. of Benef.

fit

fit to excite the charity of the faithful. A new clergy, therefore, aroſe: and monks and monaſteries began about the year five hundred. The former were not all prieſts, indeed, at firſt. But the latter were retreats of men who obliged themſelves to live in theſe convents, that I may ſpeak with exact propriety, a cenobitic life, under the conduct of the prieſts, and in all the ſuppoſed regularity and auſterity of the firſt Chriſtians. Theſe profeſſions and engagements ſtruck the imaginations, and rowſed the zeal of the faithful; and convents were endowed with as much profuſion as if nothing had been yet done for the church. Theſe orders degenerated apace; and as faſt as they did ſo new orders were founded, and endowed, under the ſame pretence. Nothing was taken from thoſe who had forfeited the conditions of the grants made to them, and much was given to thoſe who took new engagements, and kept them as ill. Thus eccleſiaſtical policy contrived to inrich the church, even by the corruption of the clergy, and to carry theſe abuſes forward, in an uniform gradation, and with an equal pace.

The claim St. Austin made to the riches of the whole world, as belonging of right to the elect, had not been made, I ſuppoſe, before his time; tho Irenaeus had juſtified the robbery of the Egyptians by the Iſraelites, on principles much the ſame. This claim too was neither publicly aſſerted by himſelf, nor by his cotemporaries, nor by his ſucceſſors, nor at any time by the church in form; the reaſon of which was, no doubt, that they ſaw how needleſs and imprudent it would be to give ſuch an alarm to all mankind, when they might go on to plunder particular countries and families without reſiſtance, tho ſometimes againſt law, and always with very great effect. This the religious ſociety did, before it had any pretence of alliance with the civil, or any eſtabliſhment in the roman empire: and it is aſtoniſhing to conſider, tho we meet with the exam-

ples and proofs almoſt in every page of hiſtory eccleſiaſtical and civil, how an order of men, inſtituted to teach a religion of ſo much purity, ſanctity, and detachment from all worldly intereſts, could convert this very inſtitution into a ſordid trade, and make other men believe that the beſt of good works was to inrich this order, and the greateſt of ſins to take any thing from it. This continued to be the caſe, however, near fifteen centuries, without any conſiderable interruption. During ſo long a courſe of time, the principles of the goſpel were ſo forgotten, and ſo perverted, that ſalvation was a merchandiſe bought and ſold in every eccleſiaſtical ſhop, in that of Rome above all. This ſhop had ſo much cuſtom, that a pope of the fourteenth century, JOHN the twenty ſecond, the inventor of annates and many other exactions, left behind him, by VILLANI's account, which father PAUL quotes in his hiſtory of benefices, eighteen millions in ſpecie, and ſeven millions in plate and ingots. An immenſe ſum in any age, eſpecially in that when the Weſt Indies had not been yet diſcovered.

THE abuſe grew to be moſt exorbitant in the moſt devout ages of the church, that is, in the ages of greateſt ignorance and ſuperſtition; for then the clergy had perſuaded men, and the more corrupt they were, the more eaſily they were perſuaded, that all ſorts of crimes might be committed ſafely by thoſe who ſubmitted to the ſlight penances and pecuniary mulcts which the church impoſed, either arbitrarily, or according to a book of rates. When, I ſay, that crimes might be committed ſafely on theſe terms, I mean ſafely from divine vengeance; for the man whom the church pretended to ſcreen from this would have been condemned at any human tribunal, and was ſo, I doubt not, often to the gallows or the rack. Thus the great ſanction of revealed religion was taken away by artificial theology and eccleſiaſtical fraud; and a great part of the objections

tions that infidels urge againſt it receive a color from the doctrine and practice of that religious ſociety, whoſe independency and divine inſtitution are pleaded for ſo ſtrenuouſly.

The religious ſociety was ſo far from being by any right independent on the civil, or from treating with it in form, and being incorporated with it on ſpecific terms of alliance, when chriſtianity became in a fortunate conjuncture the eſtabliſhed religion of the empire, that this ſociety grew into power, and into riches, as it has been ſaid already, by degrees, by indulgence and conceſſions on one hand, by art and management on the other. Claims precede acquiſitions in the natural and ordinary courſe of things. But in this caſe acquiſitions preceded claims. The church, indeed, made a claim to power, when ſhe was firſt eſtabliſhed; but it was to ſpiritual power. Nothing elſe was avowed; nothing elſe was ſuſpected. The civil ſociety did not ſee that ſpiritual power was power over opinion, and that this was power over conſcience, or ſeeing it did not enough conſider how this power might extend and increaſe, how it might rival and ſubdue their own. But as ſoon as the church had drawn a great part of the affairs of civil government into her own tribunal, under the notion of ſpirituals, or of things appertaining to ſpirituals; as ſoon as ſhe had acquired a preſcriptive right of imploying the civil power in ſpiritual quarrels, and the ſpiritual power in civil, ſhe claimed a ſovereign and univerſal authority, ſeized the two ſwords into her hands, and ſharpened the edge of both.

SECTION XXIII.

The good effects of maintaining, and the bad effects of neglecting, religion, had been extremely viſible, in the whole courſe

of the roman government. NUMA, the ſecond founder of Rome, contributed more to the proſperity and grandeur of that empire, than the firſt founder of it, ROMULUS, and all the warrior kings who ſucceeded him; for NUMA eſtabliſhed a religion, directed it, as others, both kings and conſuls, did after his example, to the ſupport of civil government, and made it the principle of all the glorious expectations that were raiſed in the minds of that people. This religion was very abſurd, and yet by keeping up an awe of ſuperior powers, and the belief of a providence that ordered the courſe of events, it produced all the marvellous effects, which MACHIAVEL, and writers more able to judge of them and of their cauſes than he was, POLYBIUS, CICERO, PLUTARCH, and others aſcribe to it. The inward peace of that government was often broke by ſeditions: Rome was in diſtreſs at home whilſt ſhe triumphed abroad, and at laſt the diſſolution of the commonwealth followed a long and bloody ſeries of civil war. But the neglect of religion, not religion, was a principal cauſe of theſe evils. Religion decayed: and the ſtate decayed with her. She might have preſerved it; but even in her decay, ſhe gave it no wounds, nor feſtered like a poiſon in any.

THIS example, many others, and the reaſon of things were ſufficient to make ſuch a man as CONSTANTINE ſee the neceſſity of reviving and reforming the antient religion of Rome, or of eſtabliſhing a new one; in ſhort, of taking in the aſſiſtance of ſome religion or other, to purſue more effectually the great deſigns of his ambition. His rivals in the empire were Pagans: and paganiſm did more than begin to be no longer a proper band of ſociety. The ſuperſtitious opinions and practices of it were as much in vogue in his time, as they had been in the beſt ages of Rome, but they were not directed, as they had been in thoſe ages, to the ſupport of civil government.

The

The virtue of old Rome, and the ſpirit of her religion, fainted, when her liberty expired: and they were wholly extinguiſhed in the time of CONSTANTINE, by a long courſe of tyrannical dominion ſeldom interrupted, by the venality of the ſenate now and long before inured to ſlavery, by the ferocity of the armies, by the licentiouſneſs of the provinces, and by that independency on the authority, as well as diſregard to the majeſty, of the empire which prevailed in both.

ON the other hand, chriſtianity, born, if I may ſay ſo, in a deſert, and educated in a little province of the empire, had ſpread thro the whole in the courſe of three centuries. The progreſs of it was not ſo immenſe, perhaps, as TERTULLIAN repreſents it in his hyperbolical ſtyle. But it was great, and Chriſtians under one denomination or another were numerous in every part of the Eaſt and Weſt. Paganiſm was worn out in one ſenſe, in theory, if not in practice; the impoſtures of it were detected; the abſurd doctrines and rites were expoſed to ridicule. The prieſts could not defend it, and the philoſophers explained it away. It lay expoſed like an unfortified country, and, as the empire did ſoon afterwards, to every incurſion. Chriſtianity was freſh and vigorous. The apparent ſanctity of thoſe who profeſſed this religion, the courage of thoſe who died for it, and the zeal of thoſe philoſophers and rhetors who were converted to it and writ for it, were more than ſufficient to defeat the calumny raiſed againſt it. They were more than ſufficient, I mean, to defeat it among all ſuch as finding it to be calumny in ſome inſtances, looked no farther, but deemed it to be the ſame in all. Among others, and in general, the very name of Chriſtian continued to be odious long. A ſpirit of enthuſiaſm prompted many on one ſide to revile and diſturb the rites of an eſtabliſhed religion, to provoke the heathen, to rejoice in ſufferings, and to court martyrdom. A ſpirit of party,

party, inflamed by reſentment, tranſported the other ſide to exerciſe the greateſt cruelties, by ſudden popular emotions, as well as by regular authoriſed perſecutions. But as ſoon as the chriſtian faith and worſhip, by being tolerated firſt, and legally eſtabliſhed ſoon afterwards, became better known, the groſſeſt calumnies, that had been propagated againſt them, began to die away even among the vulgar. Theſe calumnies had been ſuch as could not bear examination; more groſs, if that be poſſible, than any of thoſe which Chriſtians have propagated againſt the heathens, the Jews, the Mahometans, or even againſt one another in their ſeveral ſects. One may eaſily conceive, that the detection of theſe turned to the advantage of chriſtianity, and that patience under this kind of perſecution, as well as fortitude and perſeverance under another, did honor to the profeſſors of this religion, and prepared the way to the eſtabliſhment of it.

THERE is another circumſtance of the ſame tendency, which deſerves to be mentioned. Whilſt the Chriſtians were confounded with the Jews, or paſſed for a ſect of that religion, they ſhared the hatred and contempt which that nation had contracted. But they diſtinguiſhed themſelves ſoon, in a manner that took off all prejudice of this kind from them, and ſhewed the wiſdom and policy of St. PAUL's conduct in declaring himſelf the apoſtle of the Gentiles, to whom the kingdom of CHRIST was opened, and who were heirs of the promiſes as well as the Jews. On this popular principle chriſtianity was propagated: and one of the firſt edicts, that CONSTANTINE publiſhed, in favor of chriſtianity, was a very ſevere one againſt Jews, who ſhould inſult Chriſtians, and Chriſtians who ſhould turn to judaiſm. The Jews were no longer a choſen people: their nation was rejected; and all the nations of the earth were invited to partake of the ſame privileges, the ſame graces,

and

and the ſame ſalvation. Thus the chriſtian religion was made the religion of mankind, by the firſt principles of it, even whilſt it was a ſect: and therefore CONSTANTINE might think very reaſonably, that to embrace and eſtabliſh it would be an effectual means of uniting mankind under his government. He might think this eſtabliſhment the more eaſy to be made by his authority, becauſe the myſteries of chriſtianity were more ſublime and more refined, and therefore more proper objects of veneration, than thoſe of paganiſm; tho many of them had been borrowed from it, and becauſe the external worſhip of the new religion might be rendered, if that ſhould be thought neceſſary, as pompous, and as fit to draw the attention of the people, as that of the old, by adopting ſome of the ceremonies and uſages of the old; which adoption the chriſtian church had already begun to put in practice.

ALL this was done: and no man, who conſiders what influence not princes only, but private men raiſed to the head of parties, have had in the change of religions, will think it was hard for CONSTANTINE to do it when he had perſuaded his troops, that they beat MAXENTIUS under the enſign of the croſs, and when he diſputed the empire with LICINIUS, the declared enemy of the croſs afterwards. Chriſtianity became the eſtabliſhed religion of the empire, and heatheniſm, in it's turn, a perſecuted ſect, baniſhed from the cities by CONSTANTINE and his ſucceſſors, and forced to hide it's head in villages and hamlets. Whilſt gentiliſm, or the religion of nations, was the eſtabliſhed religion, chriſtianity maintained itſelf in moſt of the cities of the empire. But as ſoon as this religion had taken poſſeſſion of the court and the cities, the other became ſo generally that of peaſants only, that the appellation of paganiſm did, probably enough, take it's riſe from thence.

THIS

THIS great revolution was effected in part by the circumſtances I have mentioned, and by others that favored the growth of chriſtianity. The imperial authority did the reſt, but did it ill, ſo ill, that the chief of thoſe political views, which CONSTANTINE had in making this eſtabliſhment, were defeated by it; and the admiſſion of a religious ſociety into the ſtate, in the manner in which he admitted it, was the cauſe of all the eccleſiaſtical and theological evils that have followed from his time to ours, and that are ſo falſely imputed to religion itſelf. We may be aſſured, that the ſociety co-operated with the court to bring about a revolution ſo much to their advantage, and thought themſelves happy enough to be dependent, not independent, on the emperor; his inſtruments, not his allies; whatever appearances he might give or ſuffer them to aſſume in thoſe ſolemn eccleſiaſtical farces, wherein he condeſcended to act, in ſome reſpects, a ſecond part. This ſuppoſition is eaſily reconciled to hiſtory: and if it was leſs ſo, hiſtory would be only the more inconſiſtent. We ſhould never perſuade ourſelves that ſuch a man, as it repreſents CONSTANTINE to have been, was a bigot, as much as HELENA, or reverenced prieſts as much as ſhe did relics. He was not a bigot, tho the church has made him a ſaint; nor a bubble of eccleſiaſtical policy, tho it ſeems to me that he was ſo of his own. But whilſt he recalled to his mind, as he did moſt probably, the great ſervice religion was of to antient Rome, he ſeemed to forget that, when that religion floriſhed, and was of ſo much ſervice to the ſtate, it was under the immediate inſpection of the ſtate. There was no council, but the ſenate, to define doctrines, nor to regulate diſcipline: and men were at the head of religious, becauſe they were at the head of civil adminiſtration, inſtead of being at the head of the latter, becauſe they were at the head of the former.

WE

We cannot doubt, that the political views of Constantine, in the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity, were to attach the ſubjects of the empire more firmly to himſelf and his ſucceſſors, and the ſeveral nations that compoſed it, to one another, by the bonds of a religion common to all of them; to ſoften the ferocity of the armies; to reform the licentiouſneſs of the provinces, and by infuſing a ſpirit of moderation and ſubmiſſion to government, to extinguiſh thoſe principles of avarice and ambition, of injuſtice and violence, by which ſo many factions were formed, and the peace of the empire was ſo often and ſo fatally broken. Now no religion was ever ſo well proportioned, nor ſo well directed, as that of chriſtianity ſeemed to be to all theſe purpoſes. It had, indeed, no tendency to inſpire that love of the country, nor that zeal for the glory and grandeur of it, which glowed in the breaſt of every roman citizen almoſt, whilſt the commonwealth was in ſplendor. But it recommended, what Constantine liked better, benevolence, patience, humility, and all the ſofter virtues, ſubjection to the civil powers as to the ordinances of God, and paſſive obedience and non-reſiſtance. Theſe it recommended: and theſe it is ſaid the Chriſtians had practiſed, not only whilſt they lay under the ordinary hardſhips impoſed upon them, but under the extraordinary ſeverity of ten perſecutions, wherein eccleſiaſtical writers boaſt, how truly may be doubted, that thirty biſhops of the church of Rome alone were martyriſed *.

Such

* Ecclesiastical, like all other party writers, deſerve little credit when they relate facts, or draw characters, which may ſeem to reflect honor on thoſe of their own ſide, and to render their adverſaries odious. That Chriſtians were ſometimes perſecuted, is a point out of diſpute. But whether theſe perſecutions were ſo frequent, ſo ſevere, and ſo unprovoked, as they ſtand repreſented, is a point very diſputable. If ſome of the emperors, and thoſe not of the worſt, uſed the Chriſtians ill; others, and thoſe not of the beſt, ſhewed them favor. Origen, who was the

Such doctrines and such examples might well encourage Constantine to think, that nothing could contribute more, than the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity in the empire, to the

ſon of a martyr, and who aſpired to be ſuch himſelf, aſſerts [a], I think, that they, who ſuffered for their religion, were few. The authority is good, and the matter of fact probable. Whoever conſiders the temper and character of ſects, of religious ſects eſpecially, and of the primitive Chriſtians among others, will think it probable, that whenever they were puniſhed by the heathen magiſtrates, they were ready to impute their puniſhment to their chriſtianity, and to complain of perſecution. Their clergy were, under pretence of religion, a very lawleſs tribe, and paid little regard, on many occaſions, to the government whoſe ſubjects they were. They uſurped the part of civil judges, they aſſumed the power of making wills, they took poſſeſſion by fraud, or violence, of the eſtates of others; and not content to break the laws in ſuch inſtances as theſe, which may be called private, they broke them in the moſt public manner, and inſtigated others to break them by popular inſurrections againſt the legal authority of magiſtrates, and by tumults, and riots, in which they inſulted not only the eſtabliſhed religion of the empire, but even their own religion, as it was practiſed by thoſe who differed from them in any points of doctrine or diſcipline. Zeal, worked up to enthuſiaſm, puſhed them to theſe exceſſes, and we may well believe, that they who were puniſhed for them were decorated with the title of martyrs, and made the heroes of pious romances by the zeal of others. The liſt of martyrs conſiſted, I believe, of thoſe who ſuffered for breaking the peace, and for inſulting one religion, as much as of thoſe who ſuffered for profeſſing quietly another, nay more: and thus it might be immeaſurably lengthened. Thus too the aſſertion of Origen may be reconciled eaſily to the opinion, that there was an innumerable army of martyrs in the primitive church. We find paſſages in the letters of Julian, which confirm very much what is here ſuppoſed. In that which he writes to the Alexandrians, it appears, that he did not baniſh Athanasius becauſe he was a biſhop, but on account of his intriguing ſpirit, and the diſturbances he raiſed. Julian gives the Chriſtians leave to chooſe any other biſhop, who might inſtruct them as well as Athanasius; and adds, that if they deſired to have him at Alexandria for any other reaſon, that was the reaſon for which he was baniſhed. This emperor, on whoſe teſtimony, tho he was an apoſtate, a reaſonable man, who conſidered the characters of both, would rely much ſooner, than he would rely on that of ſuch a turbulent, intriguing, foul-mouthed prieſt as Cyril: this emperor, I ſay, complains loudly of the chriſtian flocks for perſecuting one another, and for inſulting the eſtabliſhed church, at the inſtigation of their paſtors. When he promiſes, therefore, to force none to worſhip at his altars, and commands the heathens not to injure nor affront any of them, he commands them likewiſe to live in peace with the heathens and with one another, and threatens to puniſh them, not for their religion, but for ſedition, and the violation of the civil laws.

[a] Lib. 3. contra Celſ.

eſta-

eſtabliſhment of hereditary imperial dignity in his family, and to univerſal peace and tranquillity. He was confirmed in this expectation, no doubt, by the profeſſions and adulations of SYLVESTER, and of the whole tribe of eccleſiaſtics; whether the tale of his converſion by this pope has any more truth in it, than that of his famous grant to the church of Rome, or not. But in order to diſcern the better how theſe profeſſions were kept, and what the effects have been of this eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhment, we muſt deſcend into ſome few particulars, at leaſt, concerning it, from CONSTANTINE to CHARLES the great, and from CHARLES the great down to our own age. The uſurpations of the religious on the civil ſociety, the abuſe of theology, and the abominable conſequences of this abuſe, were in part alike, and in part different, and differently carried on with regard to power eſpecially, in theſe two periods, which for that reaſon it is good to diſtinguiſh.

SECTION XXIV.

THESE uſurpations might have been wholly prevented: and altho the abuſe of theology, which was grown up to a great height, could not be ſo, yet might the growth of it have been checked, and the tragical effects of it have been prevented, if CONSTANTINE had reduced, and his ſucceſſors had kept the clergy within proper bounds, inſtead of giving ſuch a looſe to avarice and ambition, to enthuſiaſm and contentious ſubtilty, as made them the plagues and ſcourges of the world. The emperors were ſovereign pontiffs. As ſuch, either with this title, or without it, they ſhould have kept the whole power over eccleſiaſtical as well as civil affairs in their own hands, and have applied the former to preſerve order and diſcipline, to prevent abuſe and corruption in the chriſtian, as it had been

their prerogative and their duty to apply it in the heathen church. This was natural; this was reaſonble. But nothing could be more unnatural, nor more unreaſonable, than to diveſt themſelves of any part of the imperial power, in favor of this order.

It ſeems too, that there could be no need of doing ſo. That the biſhops gave the emperors leave to retain the title of ſovereign pontiffs, is one of thoſe idle tales which Baronius invented. But that no objection appears to have been made to it by the Chriſtians, is true; and if there was no objection made for holding a pagan pontificate, there would have been certainly none for aſſuming that office in the chriſtian church. I will not ſay, that the emperors might have performed pontifical functions; tho I ſee no abſurdity in the propoſition, nor am able to conceive why they ſhould not have exacted to be ordained prieſts and primates of the whole chriſtian church from the firſt, if that form had been thought neceſſary, as they have ſubmitted to be crowned emperors, ſince that time, by the biſhops. But this I will ſay, and no divine of our church will dare to contradict me, that they might have made themſelves heads of the church, defenders of the faith, and, next under God and his ſon Christ Jesus, ſupreme moderators and governors in all matters eccleſiaſtical and civil, without being prieſts. From whence ſhould any oppoſition to Constantine or his ſucceſſors have ariſen, if he or they had thought fit to execute the functions of chriſtian pontiffs, when the ſtate of religion in the empire permitted them to do ſo; ſince they kept the title, wore the robe, and executed ſome of the powers, at leaſt, of ſupreme pontiffs in the pagan church? Should it have come from the biſhops? But the biſhops were mean and generally ignorant men, exerciſed in the loweſt and leaſt honorable profeſſions, elected by party and faction, by intrigue and violence, and ready

to

to comply with any mode that was prevalent, according to the character given of them nearly about this time by St. GREGORY of Nazianze. We may aſſure ourſelves the good men would have founded high the honor which CONSTANTINE did the church, and his zeal for our holy religion, before they had got the ſtrength they got afterwards, for want of this very precaution. Then indeed, ſuch an inequality of privileges and advantages was eſtabliſhed between the clergy and the laity in many reſpects, and in this particularly, that the former were deemed capable of exerciſing all the powers, and of enjoying all the dignities and profits of civil magiſtracies, whilſt the latter were excluded from all eccleſiaſtical power, dignity, and profit. In a word, we may believe that this ſtep would have been popular among the whole body of Chriſtians, when their religion was firſt eſtabliſhed. Nothing would have appeared more juſt than that an emperor, by whoſe favor alone they became members of an eſtabliſhed church, from being members of a ſect, ſeldom tolerated, often perſecuted, and always afflicted, ſhould ſuffer no diminution of his imperial prerogative in this great change.

CONSTANTINE neglected to take this advantage, in the extent in which he might have aſſerted his right to it. He took, indeed, ſome airs of ſupremacy on certain occaſions, and ſo did his ſucceſſors. They preſided in the ſynods they convened, they controuled the proceedings of theſe aſſemblies, and they confirmed their decrees in matters of doctrine as well as diſcipline; for without this confirmation theſe decrees would have had little effect. By theſe means the emperors ſecured their prerogative, on which eccleſiaſtical ſynods would not have failed to incroach more than they did, or at leaſt faſter, in caſes of appeals, of exemptions from ſecular juriſdiction, or from the common burden of taxes, and in many other caſes. But the ſucceſſors of CONSTAN-

CONSTANTINE laying aſide even the title of ſovereign pontiffs in little more than half a century, if GRATIAN did lay it aſide, and neither CONSTANTINE nor they having preſerved a ſteady exerciſe of the pontifical power over eccleſiaſtical affairs and eccleſiaſtical perſons in the chriſtian church, the exerciſe of it devolved of courſe on the biſhops. A conſtant exerciſe gave the pretence, and ſettled the opinion of a ſole right in them, who could have none independently on the emperors, even in ordinary caſes, to many extraordinary powers, whilſt an occaſional exerciſe of powers that belonged of right to theſe princes came to be looked upon in them as uſurpation and ſacrilege. Their chaplains became their maſters: and one of theſe pretends to be ſo even at this time. How CONSTANTINE was the bubble of his own policy, as I have preſumed to ſay that he was, as many great men have been, and as CHARLEMAGNE was in much the ſame reſpect four hundred years after him, may be ſhewn, I think, on good grounds of probability, without ſuppoſing him to have been miſled by a bigot reſpect for the church, which many of thoſe who ſucceeded him were. It may be ſhewn, I think, even by eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, for this, like other hiſtories, ſhews very often more than it owns, even what it denies; and the ſagacity of the reader gives him often a right of ſaying to the hiſtorian "ex ore tuo condemnaberis."

THUS it ſeems to me, that the great and fundamental error from whence ſo many others proceeded, and which CONSTANTINE committed in the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity, was this, which has been touched already. He admitted a clergy into the eſtabliſhment, on the ſame foot on which this order had ſtood, whilſt chriſtianity was the religion, and theſe men were the heads, the directors, the governors, and magiſtrates of a ſect by no authority but that of the ſect it ſelf, and therefore illegally ſuch. He admitted them, veſted with this authority, which

which might be neceſſary as long as Chriſtians made a ſect apart, diſtinct from the other ſubjects of the empire, and not only out of the protection of the laws, but obnoxious to them, and which became unneceſſary and dangerous when chriſtianity had a legal eſtabliſhment, and when the profeſſors of it were entirely incorporated into the empire, enjoyed the protection of the laws in common with other ſubjects, and more of the ſmiles and favors of the court. The conduct of CONSTANTINE, on this great occaſion, muſt needs appear extremely abſurd to every one who conſiders the conſequences it had. But we may eaſily conceive that the ſtate of chriſtianity, of paganiſm, and of the empire in general, as well as a multitude of particular circumſtances to us unknown, might determine him, on apparent reaſons of good policy, to hold it. If we ſeek for theſe reaſons in the hiſtorians of that age, or in more modern eccleſiaſtical writers, we ſhall be miſled or diſappointed. EUSEBIUS wrote a panegyric, ZOZIMUS a ſatyr, and no relations can be more confuſed, no authority more precarious than thoſe of all the authors who have treated theſe ſubjects, and indeed every other eccleſiaſtical ſubject, from that age to this. They have been all intent to ſerve ſome particular turn: and tho all men are regardleſs of truth in ſuch a diſpoſition of mind, yet are there none ſo regardleſs of it as theſe writers, who have rendered church hiſtory more inconſiſtent, and more groſſly fabulous, than any other hiſtory, perhaps, than ſome romances. But ſtill, notwithſtanding the little reliance that any of them deſerve, ſome general truths reſult from the concurrent tenor of their writing; two of which I ſhall mention, in order to account for the conduct of CONSTANTINE.

SECTION XXV.

THE firſt of theſe truths is, that this emperor neither deſigned to eſtabliſh chriſtianity, nor did in fact eſtabliſh it with any other view, than that of making it ſubſervient to his ambition and policy. He worked up this eſtabliſhment of religion, which he preferred to paganiſm, for reaſons already given, by ſlow degrees, as he found it anſwer his purpoſes, and he trimmed long between the two. The ſecond of theſe truths is, that in the deſign of attaching the whole body of Chriſtians to himſelf, he choſe to do it by the medium of the clergy. The Chriſtians were diſperſed over the empire, and even beyond the bounds of it. They were of all nations and all languages. But among them all, this order of men, which we call the religious ſociety, was eſtabliſhed. This order was often divided; and their diviſions formed different ſects. But however divided they were, nay the more they were divided, the more need they had of imperial favor. The paſtors were brought by one common intereſt under the influence of the court; and the flocks were every where under the influence of their paſtors. Theſe two principles run thro the whole conduct of CONSTANTINE, in every relation of it that is come down to us.

THERE is little room to doubt, that he had taken the reſolution of eſtabliſhing chriſtianity when he marched, in the ſeventh year of his reign, from Gaul into Italy againſt MAXENTIUS. It is much more probable too, that this reſolution produced the miracle of an illuminated croſs in the air, with an inſcription promiſing him victory, and which he affirmed upon oath that he had ſeen, as EUSEBIUS relates, than that any ſuch miracle produced his converſion. A ſtory like this was ſufficient to make the impreſſion he deſigned. Nay that which ZOZI-

MUS

MUS relates of a monſtrous flight of owls, that ſettled on the walls of Rome when MAXENTIUS marched out of the city to give CONSTANTINE battle, and which this emperor ſeeing, drew out his troops, might have it's effect likewiſe. His army did not conſiſt of Romans, attached to their antient religion, tho even by ſuch the omen would have been well received, but of Britons, whom we believe to have been, already Chriſtians, and of the celtic nations, to whom we may believe that all religions were indifferent enough.

BUT however this might be, whether CONSTANTINE came into Italy with a reſolution of eſtabliſhing chriſtianity, and of leaning on that party in the empire, or whether he took the reſolution when he had beat MAXENTIUS, it is evident that this reſolution was no other than I have repreſented it. LICINIUS was not certainly a convert to chriſtianity, and yet the firſt edict in favor of this religion was publiſhed in his name and by his authority, as well as in the name and by the authority of CONSTANTINE. This edict gave an intire liberty of conſcience. No perſon was to be any longer reſtrained from embracing chriſtianity, but every one was ſet at liberty to profeſs the religion he liked beſt. This was the purport of the edict. EUSEBIUS himſelf carries it no farther, and there was nothing in it which LICINIUS, or any other pagan prince, who thought it his intereſt to relax the ſeverity of former edicts, and to keep meaſures of moderation with the Chriſtians, might not grant without becoming a Chriſtian. Many other favors, more conſiderable and particular to chriſtianity, were granted afterwards. EUSEBIUS ſounds them high *: and they were great, no doubt, tho they did little more than re-eſtabliſh Chriſtians in their former rights and poſſeſſions, remit unjuſt and cruel ſentences, reſtore confiſcations, and recal from baniſhment and

* EUSEB. paſſim in hiſt. et in vita CONSTANT.

the mines ſuch as had been condemned to them. In all theſe inſtances, the authority of LICINIUS concurred with that of CONSTANTINE: and if paganiſm was not extirpated, chriſtianity was in a good degree eſtabliſhed, whilſt they governed the empire jointly. When they quarrelled, the ſame political motive, that made LICINIUS change his conduct and perſecute the Chriſtians, made CONSTANTINE perſiſt in ſhewing favor to them. He raiſed them to the higheſt dignities, intruſted them with the moſt important commands, and increaſed the ſtrength of a party in the empire which was zealouſly attached to him.

NOTWITHSTANDING this he trimmed with the other, and it is evident that his zeal for chriſtianity was at leaſt as much political as religious. EUSEBIUS makes him very devout and pious, and compares, in one place, his palace to a church in which aſſemblies of the faithful were held. But as the flagrant crimes he committed are inconſiſtent with the devotion and piety aſcribed to him by eccleſiaſtical adulation, ſo the whole tenor of his public acts demonſtrates that ZOZIMUS had ſome reaſon to ſay, he favored the pagan rites in order to pleaſe the ſenate, tho he meaned to eſtabliſh chriſtianity. Thus he permitted, even about the time that he held the nicaean council, and by a ſolemn reſcript, that the aruſpices ſhould be publicly conſulted; nay he commanded it on the occaſion of ſome reputed prodigies that had happened. Thus again, he gave countenance, at leaſt, to ſeveral ſuperſtitious ſports that were celebrated in acknowledgment of victories obtained, and to ſeveral ſorts of inchantments that were deemed effectual to procure health and other divine favors. Many inſtances of the ſame kind may be produced, to ſhew what meaſures CONSTANTINE thought himſelf obliged in good policy to keep with paganiſm, even after he had vanquiſhed LICINIUS, and put him to death. But it will be ſufficient

ficient that I mention one more, which was the ſtrongeſt of all, and which leads to the ſecond of theſe general truths, that have been obſerved to reſult from all the hiſtories of this great revolution.

THAT ſeveral offices, which were not only pagan in name, but in their functions too, were poſſeſſed and executed by thoſe who profeſſed chriſtianity, ſeems to me much more clear than the diſtinctions and excuſes that are brought in favor of the practice. The practice was authoriſed by the example of CONSTANTINE, who held to the laſt the ſupreme pontificate of the pagan church. I know that ſome writers have ventured to deny the fact, againſt the evidence of hiſtory and antient inſcriptions. I know too, that much caſuiſtry has been employed by BARONIUS and others, to ſhew that chriſtian emperors might aſſume the title, and wear the robe, without ſuperſtition or idolatry; for theſe authors are pleaſed to ſuppoſe, that they did no more. But they contradict themſelves when they excuſe even this, by urging, that the authority of ſupreme pontiff was neceſſary to keep the ſenate and the bulk of the people, who were ſtrongly addicted to the old religion, in ſubjection to the imperial authority; for how could the authority of ſupreme pontiff have this or any other effect, unleſs it was exerciſed? And how could it be exerciſed, without taking ſome ſhare in the ſuperſtitious diſcipline ſignified by that myſtic robe *, which GRATIAN is ſaid to have refuſed to wear for that very reaſon? But if GRATIAN was thus ſcrupulous, and his ſucceſſors after him, of which we may have leave to doubt, CONSTANTINE was not ſo; or he might wear the myſtic robe of pontiff with as little regard to the ſignifications of it, as one of the OTHOS had, very probably, to thoſe of the robe he wore, and whereon the revelations of the apocalypſe were expreſſed in embroidery. The power and in-

* ZOZIMUS.

fluence of this office had been great at all times, and therefor the emperors had kept it like that of the tribunes in their own hands. But this power and this influence were never greater than now, and the office of pontiff was grown more conſiderable than that of conſul. It is very probable that CONSTANTINE dared not diveſt himſelf of it: and I believe the beſt reaſon that can be given why he did not make himſelf ſovereign pontiff of the Chriſtians is this, that he found it neceſſary, or at leaſt expedient, to continue high prieſt of the Pagans. The abſurdity, however, was equally great, whether it was owing to his misfortune or his fault. The abſurdity, I mean, of preſiding over a church he intended to ſubvert, and not preſiding over that which he intended to erect.

THE conſequences began to appear very ſoon, and have continued ever ſince producing, under various forms, in various ways, and with little or no interruption, an uniformity of miſchief. The pre-eminence and dominion over conſcience, which a religious ſociety had acquired among the Chriſtians whilſt they were a ſect in the empire, did not only continue, but were vaſtly extended and increaſed when this religion became the eſtabliſhed religion of the empire. They were extended and increaſed in the exerciſe, and therefore in the effect of them. No powers were taken from this order of men, not even thoſe to which they had the leaſt pretence after this great change. On the contrary, many were added to them, and the weight of that civil authority, on which they uſurped, ſerved to inforce their uſurpations. Their pre-eminence and their dominion over conſcience had been ſo far from promoting charity, and maintaining unity, that they had promoted and maintained a perpetual ſtrife and contention among Chriſtians. If Chriſtians ſuffered much by heathen perſecutions, they ſuffered much by their own inteſtine diviſions. They could not, indeed, make

make war, and maſſacre one another, nor diſturb, in that manner, the peace of the empire. The authority of the emperors, and the ſtrength of the roman legions kept them in awe, and made ſuch exceſſes impracticable. But their diviſions were ſuch, that the ſect might have been diſſolved, perhaps, whilſt it was a ſect, and the very name of chriſtianity have been loſt, if the ſalutary remedy of a perſecution, common to them all, had not ſometimes intervened to make them remember, that they were all of the ſame religion. Theſe diſorders, however, being confined to a ſect, affected the roman ſtate no more than ours would be affected, if any diſputes ſhould ariſe about inward light and ſpiritual gifts among the quakers, and if thoſe peaceable perſons ſhould fall out, call names, and excommunicate one another. But when the empire became chriſtian, theſe diviſions became fatal to the public tranquillity and welfare.

CONSTANTINE had ſome experience of this in his own reign, towards the end of it eſpecially. But he might ſtill hope, and the ſubmiſſive behavior of the clergy towards him might encourage him to hope, that however divided they were concerning ſpeculative points of religion, he ſhould hold them faſt to his intereſt by their own, and being maſter of the ſhepherds, ſhould be maſter of the flocks, as it has been hinted already. He purſued this principle therefore. He added to the dignity of eccleſiaſtical perſons, by the regard he ſhewed them, and by the honors he affected to do them. He added to their power and authority, by the wealth, the privileges, and immunities he beſtowed upon them, and by the laws he made in their favor. All this tended, in appearance and in pretence, to the ſupport and improvement of a ſpiritual power alone. He meaned, that this ſhould be diſtinct from the civil; that they ſhould be independent of one another, and both dependent

on

on him; and he did not ſee that this was a diſtinction without any real difference. He does not ſeem to have enough conſidered two things, which long experience has made manifeſt ſince, and which one would imagine he ſhould have foreſeen. He ſhould have foreſeen, that eccleſiaſtical magiſtrates would be always leſs dependent on the emperors than the civil, and were for that reaſon leſs fit to be truſted with power. It was obvious, that civil magiſtrates were the creatures of his will, whom he could make and unmake at pleaſure, and not only deprive of the offices they held, but of all right to any magiſtracy whatever; whereas theſe eccleſiaſtical magiſtrates, whom he admitted by a legal eſtabliſhment into the empire, were elected independently on him into particular offices, and had a right to this ſort of magiſtracy in general, which he could neither give nor take away. He ſhould have foreſeen, that an abſolute power over private conſciences was in nature, and might prove in effect, a much greater power than his own; that the church might turn againſt the ſtate; from the companion become the rival, and from the rival, the tyrant of it. This happened in four centuries after his time. The conſtitution of the chriſtian church, before CONSTANTINE laid the foundations of that ſpiritual tyranny, which he and his ſucceſſors raiſed; and this ſpiritual tyranny, eſtabliſhed and grown into full ſtrength before CHARLES the great, laid the foundations of that temporal tyranny, which he and his father eſtabliſhed in the biſhops of Rome, the remains of which are ſtill exiſtent.

SECTION XXVI.

DURING this period, that reaches from the beginning of the fourth to the end of the eighth century, the religious ſociety pretended directly to ſpiritual power alone, as it has been obſerved.

ſerved. Indirectly, indeed, they aſſumed a ſhare of the other, incroached on the civil magiſtrates, and oppoſed and inſulted them, whereof there were ſeveral inſtances at Rome and Alexandria particularly *. But in the main, they expreſſed great reſpect and ſubmiſſion to the emperors. CONSTANTINE abetted

* No inſtance of this kind can be given greater than the whole conduct of CYRIL, the alexandrian biſhop. This ſaint and father of the church was violent and cruel againſt all thoſe who differed from him, even in expreſſion; for NESTORIUS did little more: and yet, when he had prevailed on THEODOSIUS, by bribing moſt probably the eunuch SCHOLASTICUS, to turn at once from favoring NESTORIUS to declare againſt him, this wretch, in concert with pope CELESTINUS, perſecuted the poor man to death with the moſt perſevering and inveterate malice He ſhewed the ſame violence of temper in uſurping on the civil power, and in ſupporting theſe uſurpations by riots, inſurrections, and aſſaſſinations. He took upon him, without any authority from the civil magiſtrate, to puniſh not only Jews, but ſuch Chriſtians as he called heretics; to drive them out of the city, and to plunder their houſes and churches, the ſpoils of which he abandoned to the mob, who were the inſtruments of his tyranny, for their greater encouragement. ORESTES, the governor of Alexandria, complained of theſe invaſions and outrages, and attempted to reſtrain them, as it was his duty to do. But CYRIL, by exciting the common people, the moſt ſeditious that were to be found in any city of the empire, maintained, as it were, a civil war in that city, and called in another ſort of mob to join with this in ſupporting it. He called in five hundred monks at once from their retreats in the mountains of Nitria. To one of theſe, named AMMONIUS, a fit inſtrument for his purpoſe, he gave the command of this ſecular and eccleſiaſtical mob, by whom ORESTES was attacked in the ſtreets of Alexandria. He was reſcued, indeed, and his life was ſaved, tho he had been wounded by AMMONIUS in the fray. The mob was diſperſed, AMMONIUS ſeiſed and put to death, and CYRIL had the impudence to declare him a martyr, and to cauſe him to be honored as ſuch.

IT may not be amiſs to mention another example of the revengeful and ſanguinary character of this prelate. HYPATIA was a platonician lady, of ſo much wiſdom, knowledge, and virtue, that ſhe uſed to be conſulted by the philoſophers, and even the governors of Alexandria, and that ORESTES was particularly attached to her. To be revenged, therefore, of ORESTES, for HYPATIA does not appear to have given him any provocation, this woman was attacked by another eccleſiaſtical bravo, whoſe name was PETER, at the inſtigation of CYRIL, in the ſtreets of Alexandria, where they ſtripped her naked, dragged her along, and made her ſuffer the moſt cruel outrages, till ſhe expired.

IT is not worth my while to quote any more inſtances of the uſurpations and cruelty which the religious ſociety exerciſed, whenever, and wherever, they durſt. Hiſtory is full of them. They were exerciſed at Rome ſometimes, as well as at Alexandria, and wherever chriſtianity prevailed.

them

them in the exercise of this power, and his successors sometimes thro bigotry, and sometimes thro policy, as we may collect from the different characters of these princes, made themselves parties, on one side or the other, in every ecclesiastical dispute that arose. This gave them much to do, maintained a perpetual ferment in the empire, and was almost as great an evil from within, as the inundation of barbarous nations was from without.

Let us not presume, like many divines, to account, by the short and fallible rule of human reason, for what providence directs or suffers. But we may observe with astonishment, that a religion, revealed by God himself, taught by himself in one country, where he sealed it with his blood, as strangely as that may sound to a mere theist, and propagated thro a great part of the world by persons commissioned by him, as well as assisted supernaturally by the holy ghost, should continue more than seventeen hundred years in a flux state. I affirm the more boldly, that it has continued in this state so long, because, tho it will be said, and is said every day in the pulpit, that all the important points of christianity, and every thing made necessary to salvation, are fixed and clear, yet the assertion is evidently false, when it is applied to theological, however true it would be, if it was applied to gospel christianity; and it may be proved to be so even out of the inconsistent mouths of those who make it. To whatever sect we addict ourselves, if we are saved, it must be on the faith of man, it cannot be on that of God; for the pure word of God neither is nor ever has been the sole criterion of orthodoxy. Theology has done by the word, as philosophy did by the works of God, and the same abuse has been made of both. Naturalists have built immense systems of imagination on a few sensible phaenomena, inaccurately observed very often, and not always very fairly

fairly recorded. Divines have done the ſame, on a few intelligible and unintelligible paſſages, picked up here and there in the ſcriptures, and connected and commented as their purpoſes required. The firſt have not ſtopped where the phaenomena have ceaſed; nor the other, where the ſcriptures have been ſilent, or have not ſpoken clearly; which ought to be reputed the ſame, and to check our preſumption alike. On the contrary, where they have had no rule to go by, like men freed from reſtraint, they have gone the greateſt and the boldeſt lengths. This has been the caſe from the apoſtolical days to theſe, and to this we owe all the diſputes that have puzzled religion, and all the miſchief which theſe diſputes have brought on the world. This muſt be the caſe too, till divines return to the goſpel, as philoſophers have returned to nature, and preſume to dogmatiſe no farther than the plain import of it will juſtify, contenting themſelves to leave things dark and ambiguous, which revelation has left ſo. How ſoon this will happen, I know not. Such a method is now, as it was of old, too ſober for enthuſiaſts, the ſubject too barren for rhetors, and the avowal of ignorance too humble for doctors, who pretend to teach ſupernatural, as well as natural theology, and to aſſume to themſelves, that knowledge, which CHRIST intended ſhould be common to all who are to be ſaved by it, as ERASMUS ſomewhere or other obſerves *. But we muſt go back again to the primitive ages, that we may ſee in ſome few particular inſtances, the riſe and growth of human authority in matters of religion.

IT was foretold, that falſe prophets would ariſe among Chriſtians, and it was natural that they ſhould in ſuch an age, in

* —— ad paucos homines contrahimus rem, quâ CHRISTUS voluit nihil eſſe communius.

countries where the minds of men had been long prepared for every thing that appeared ſupernatural or myſtic, and on the publication of a religion new and marvellous. Converted Jews might think, and in fact did think, that they had a right to take their ſhare in building up and adorning a religion, which ſprung out of theirs, and whoſe authority reſted on that of their prophecies. Converted heathens might think, and in fact did think, that they had at leaſt as good a right of the ſame kind, ſince ſome of the moſt ſublime doctrines of chriſtianity were ſuch as PYTHAGORAS and PLATO had taught, and ſince the prophecies, urged from heathen records concerning CHRIST, were much more clear and expreſs than any of thoſe that were brought from the jewiſh ſcriptures. But there were other circumſtances, which gave more immediate temptation and pretence to the falſe prophets that aroſe in the days of the apoſtles, and multiplied very faſt afterwards, like ſwarms of inſects from thoſe dung-hills, the cabaliſtical ſchools of Jews, and the metaphyſical ſchools of heathens.

THE chriſtian ſyſtem of faith and practice was taught by God himſelf, and to aſſert or to imply, that the divine Logos, who was incarnated to inſtruct as well as to redeem mankind, revealed it incompletely or imperfectly, is not leſs abſurd nor leſs impious, than to aſſert, or to imply, that he performed the work of our redemption incompletely or imperfectly. Chriſtianity therefore, as the ſaviour publiſhed it, was full and ſufficient to all the purpoſes of it. Simplicity and plainneſs ſhewed, that it was deſigned to be the religion of mankind, and manifeſted likewiſe the divinity of it's original. But then, this very ſimplicity and plainneſs was a ſtumbling block to ſome, and a pretence to others. The theology of thoſe ages had accuſtomed men to think, that nothing could be divine, which was not myſterious, and that incoherent, obſcure rhapſodies,

which

which are frequently the language of ignorance or fraud, were ſure characteriſtics of ſuperior knowledge in the firſt philoſophy, or of inſpiration from above. The prophets, among the Jews, had ſpoke in this ſtyle; the heathen oracles pronounced aenigmas; the theology of Egypt and the Eaſt was unintelligible, and the metaphyſical refinements of the greek philoſophers were a mere jargon of words, ſuppoſed to ſignify moſt ſublime truths, tho they had really no meaning at all. The Jews, therefore, who believed in the Meſſiah when he appeared, and the heathens, who heard that the divine Logos had appeared, could not fail to receive his doctrine agreeably to their prejudices and habitudes. A ſyſtem of natural law, enforced by a divine miſſion, and a divine ſanction, had nothing in it which was new to either of them; and the heathens knew, that the title of ſon of God had been given to ZOROASTER and to others. But the ſimplicity and plainneſs of his doctrine might ſurpriſe them the more, for this very reaſon. They could ſcarce fail to perſuade themſelves, that this ſimplicity and plainneſs muſt be the veil of ſomething more marvellous and more worthy of a revelation. All was type and figure in the ſacred writings of the Jews, and they were obliged to underſtand now of a ſpiritual, what they had till now underſtood of a temporal kingdom. All the groſs conceptions of polytheiſm and idolatry were exploded. Heaven continued to be peopled as much as ever, but with inhabitants of another kind. In ſhort, all the pompous rites and ceremonies of external worſhip were aboliſhed at firſt among Chriſtians, and God was to be adored in ſpirit and in truth. After ſuch changes as theſe, it ſeems to me, that the converts to chriſtianity could not, as they did not, fail, agreeably to their prejudices and habitudes, to embroider ſome of the tinſel of the religions they left on the religion they embraced, nor to make the ſpirituality of one as fit to create

aſtoniſhment, and to maintain an attachment in the minds of men, as the carnality of the others.

THIS was done, and great means of doing it offered themſelves. Chriſtianity was taught firſt, and propagated afterwards, by word of mouth. So the apoſtles and the diſciples received it, and ſo they inſtructed the converts they made in their ſeveral diſperſions. Nor were theſe the ſole preachers of divine revelation. Others aroſe who had not been taught in the ſame ſchool, nor been commiſſioned to teach in the ſame manner. PAUL himſelf was one of theſe. He entered a volunteer into the apoſtleſhip. At leaſt his extraordinary vocation was known to none but himſelf. He went about preaching his goſpel, as he called it, before he had any correſpondence, or even acquaintance, with thoſe who compoſed the church of CHRIST at that time; and when he came among them he took the air of a maſter, ſubmitted to none, but controuled and reprimanded even the prince of the apoſtles, as you pretended catholics affect to call St. PETER. The apoſtles, the diſciples, and the firſt converts in general, were ignorant, illiterate perſons. Such men, therefore, as deemed themſelves more ſkilful in cabaliſtical interpretations of the ſcriptures, and more knowing in jewiſh and heathen theology, might aſſume the ſame rights which the apoſtles and diſciples exerciſed; teach, convert, and form different congregations: or they might add to, and alter the doctrines, which the apoſtles and diſciples taught, and thus form different ſects, in the ſame churches, by aſſuming no other right than that which every member had, man and woman indiſcriminately, the right of propheſying or preaching, as often as they pleaſed to ſuppoſe that the ſpirit moved them to it. The apoſtles oppoſed the falſe prophets that aroſe in their time, by epiſtles, by meſſages, and by reviſiting the churches they had themſelves founded, but often without

without effect, and always with much difficulty, as we may judge by that which PAUL found to maintain his authority in the church of Corinth, and in others.

ONE would think that the gifts of the ſpirit, among which this of propheſying or preaching held a firſt place, ſhould not only have ſupplied the want of all other knowledge, and have put to ſilence the moſt learned and eloquent, but ſhould have eſtabliſhed, by the influence and energy of one and the ſame ſpirit, one and the ſame ſyſtem of faith and manners in the whole chriſtian church. This would have been the caſe too, it muſt have been ſo neceſſarily, if all thoſe who pretended to gifts of the ſpirit had really had them; and it has always ſeemed to me that ORIGEN anſwered CELSUS very poorly, when, to juſtify or excuſe the variety of opinions and ſects among Chriſtians, he urges thoſe that abounded among the heathen philoſophers. But many thought they had theſe gifts of the ſpirit who had them not, many pretended to have them who knew they had them not; and it grew ſo eaſy to impoſe the belief of them on the multitude, that SIMON, who had offered to buy them, might think himſelf well off that bargain, perhaps, and that the other heretics who aroſe might not find any want of them to eſtabliſh their ſects. The belief that they had them was eaſily wrought by ſham miracles, by ſeeming or real auſterity of life, by diſcourſes filled with falſe ſublime about ſpiritual beings and metaphyſical or ſupernatural doctrines, and by other proofs of the ſame equivocal ſort, in an age when enthuſiaſm was the epidemical diſeaſe, and when one great revelation gave occaſion and pretence to ſo many little ones. That ſuch was the temper of the age, and ſuch the character of thoſe who profeſſed chriſtianity in it, will appear the leſs doubtful to us, if we call to mind the ſeveral apocalypſes that were current among the primitive Chriſtians, the apocalypſe or revelation of

St. JOHN

St. JOHN and that of CERINTHUS, for inſtance, if they were not the ſame, and if the reſveries of a mad judaiſing Chriſtian have not got into the canon under the apoſtle's name: the apocalypſe of St. PETER, that of St. PAUL, and that of Saint THOMAS likewiſe, all of which are now loſt, and have been ſo long, but the ſtyle and matter of which may be gueſſed at with ſufficient aſſurance by the ſtyle and matter of that which we have in our hands. That the apoſtles, to whom theſe are aſcribed, were not the authors of them may well be. But the authors of them were Chriſtians; and if all the fathers and churches did not receive them, as all did not receive the apocalypſe admitted into our canon, yet many did, and that is ſufficient for my purpoſe, eſpecially when it is joined to ſo many other inſtances of enthuſiaſm as the firſt Chriſtians gave, which cannot be denied, tho the terms may be changed, and madneſs and phrenſy may be called divine illumination, myſtical rapture, or holy zeal.

THE names alone of thoſe who held different opinions concerning the moſt important points of chriſtianity, and formed different ſects, would fill a very long roll; and even a ſummary account of their doctrines would fill a treatiſe much larger than I deſign this eſſay ſhall be. Beſides which, I am far from believing the greateſt part of the abſurdities, profanations and impieties imputed to them by IRENAEUS, EPIPHANIUS, CLEMENT of Alexandria, EUSEBIUS, and others, ſome as antient, and ſome more modern. What credit and what reſpect ſoever fathers and eccleſiaſtical writers may deſerve on other ſubjects, ſure I am that they deſerve none, when they ſpeak of thoſe who differed from them, and on whom, for that ſufficient reaſon, the brand of hereſy had been once fixed. The parties of ſuch men were their judges: and we know them only by the paſſionate accuſations which their enemies brought, and the

the ſevere ſentences which they pronounced. Even the writings againſt opinions that prevailed after long conteſts, and conteſts ſometimes of dubious iſſue in the church, as well as the writings againſt chriſtianity itſelf, were ſtifled in their birth, or deſtroyed afterwards by the vigilance of the orthodox, and the zeal of emperors who exerted their whole authority for this purpoſe; inſtances of which are to be found in the theodoſian code, particularly. Nothing can be therefore more uncharitable, nor more unjuſt, for charity and juſtice are due to the dead as well as to the living, than to join in the common cry againſt the heretics, that aroſe in the firſt and ſucceeding ages of the church, to do this implicitly on the moſt ſuſpicious teſtimony, and to do it in the full extent of abominations and abſurdities imputed to them by eccleſiaſtical writers. I ſhall decline this proceeding, tho the cuſtom be ſo eſtabliſhed, and ſo ſanctified in opinion, that he who declines it runs the riſk of becoming an object of the ſame uncharitableneſs and injuſtice.

Many accuſations have been brought by Chriſtians againſt Chriſtians, that carry on their front as evident marks of calumny, as any of thoſe which the heathen brought againſt the whole body of Chriſtians, in the rage of party and the fury of perſecution. The former ſeem even to have been invented on the latter, and they were applied to the ſame cruel uſe wherever the orthodox had power for it. The carpocratians, or the montaniſts, or both, for both were comprehended in the general appellation of gnoſtics, lay under the imputation of drawing blood from infants, and making up the ſacramental bread with it. Can we doubt that this idle tale took it's riſe from another, which the heathens propagated againſt the Chriſtians, whom they accuſed of ſacrificing children and eating their fleſh? That the celebration of nocturnal myſteries among the Chriſtians might give occaſion to ſome debauch, as it had done among

among the Pagans, we may believe. But that the promiſcuous, nay inceſtuous uſe of women was a religious inſtitution of any ſect, or that the nicholaites preſcribed this uſe of them on every friday, as one of the neceſſary means of ſalvation, I believe no more than I do the ſilly ſtory, as circumſtantial as it is, which TERTULLIAN refutes, of a dog tied to a candleſtick in the love-feaſts of Chriſtians, which he pulled down and extinguiſhed by catching at a piece of bread thrown out of his reach; after which, not only other devout perſons mingled together in the dark promiſcuouſly, but even fathers and daughters, mothers and ſons, brothers and ſiſters, in one common inceſt.

THESE objections, and ſuch as theſe, ſhould not have been made by the orthodox, out of a regard to truth; nor ſhould others have been inſiſted on as much as they were, perhaps, in point of prudence. The ſimonians were reputed magicians, like the founder of their ſect. So were the carpocratians, the valentinians, and others. They pretended to charms and enchantments, to command the good, to conſtrain the evil ſpirits, and to exerciſe all the imaginary powers of this kind, which were believed in a ſuperſtitious age, under the notion of magic natural and theurgic. The impoſition was groſs, no doubt, and the practice a cheat. But if we had in our hands the apologies of theſe heretics, as we have thoſe of the orthodox, I ſuſpect that we ſhould find the former ready to juſtify, or to excuſe, themſelves by the example of the latter. They might quote, unjuſtly indeed, but plauſibly at that time, the precept of St. JAMES *, and the practice of the church as an example of both kinds of magic in one. The apoſtle directs, that prayers ſhould be ſaid over the ſick, and that they ſhould be anointed with oil in the name of the Lord; the effect of which ceremony

* Chap. v.

was

was to be the cure of their infirmities, and the remiſſion of their ſins. Your pretended catholic church employs it ſo late, that, tho you believe piouſly that it ſerves for the remiſſion of ſins, you cannot diſcover, by experiment, whether it ſerves as effectually to the cure of diſeaſes. But in the primitive church, the remedy was employed for both, and the ſick took it betimes. It was a ſecret, might the apologiſts of hereſy ſay, both of natural and theurgic magic, and they might pretend that ſeveral ſuch had been diſcovered by them, or by their illuminated maſters. They might proceed farther, and quote all the pompous things that chriſtian apologiſts uſed to advance concerning the power they pretended to exerciſe daily over daemons, whom they conjured, ſubdued, and expelled out of the bodies of men, when all the exorciſms of the heathens had failed. The apologiſts of theſe hereſies, who writ later, might urge ſtill greater authorities to juſtify their pretenſions. They might appeal, for inſtance, to the conſtant and univerſal practice of their adverſaries themſelves, even in that age, who admitted neither children nor perſons grown up to baptiſm, till the impure ſpirits were driven from them by exorciſms, and by the holy blowings of prieſts upon them, which ſuperſtitious ceremony was brought gravely as a proof in the diſpute with the ſemi-pelagians about grace, and was ſuppoſed neceſſary to precede baptiſm, as baptiſm grace.

The truth is, that ſeveral of the ſuperſtitious notions, inſtitutions, and cuſtoms of the eaſtern and egyptian nations creeped into chriſtianity, round about thro judaiſm at firſt, and afterwards directly. Every one took of this tinſel, as I called it above, what he liked beſt, or what he thought might be beſt adjuſted to improve the chriſtian ſyſtem. This was done by jewiſh converts, in the ſpirit of the cabbala, which taught them, under the pretence of explaining, to create myſteries where

there were none, and by heathen converts, in the delirious ſpirit of metaphyſics, which they had caught from the pythagorean and platonic philoſophy. It was common to all Chriſtians. It was not confined to thoſe who were called heretics, becauſe they differed from thoſe who aſſumed the title of orthodox. If the former aſſumed the pompous title of gnoſtics, and deſpiſed the firſt preachers of chriſtianity as ignorant and illiterate men, the latter grew gnoſtics ſoon, without aſſuming the title, tho CLEMENT of Alexandria maintained, that to be a good Chriſtian, it was neceſſary to be a good gnoſtic. Thus ignorance and learning conſpired to turn the plaineſt religion that ever was into a chaos of theology, from which it has never been reduced again to an uniform, conſiſtent, and intelligible ſyſtem. It ſeems too that the teachers of it have never deſigned that it ſhould be ſo reduced; for they have proceeded, in every age, as if religion was intended, ſays the author of Hudibras very ſenſibly, in his burleſque ſtyle, for nothing elſe but to be mended. God drew light out of darkneſs: men have drawn darkneſs out of light; and whilſt many have pretended to be their guides, they have wandered different ways without any guide at all; for it is in this caſe moſt true, that the blind have led the blind, and they have all fallen, ſome into one ditch, ſome into another. All have pretended ſubmiſſion to the authority of God. All without exception, orthodox as well as heretics, have ſubmitted, in truth, to the authority of man. Numberleſs human inſtitutions have divided a world that the divine might have united, and inſtead of univerſal peace, founded on univerſal benevolence, the natural effect of the latter, they have cauſed and maintained perpetual diſcord, hatred, wars, perſecutions, and maſſacres. I ſaid that chriſtianity became a chaos of theology, and the image is proper. It has been compoſed of jarring elements ever ſince.

nulli

——————————— nulli ſua forma manebat,
Obſtabatque aliis aliud.———————————

THESE diviſions and contentions were ſo general in the primitive church, that St. JEROM ſuppoſes them to have given occaſion to the inſtitution of biſhops: and I will obſerve by the way, that I may make my court to your clergy and ours, that even on this hypotheſis biſhops may be reckoned of apoſtolical inſtitution; ſince the reaſon of inſtituting them commenced in the days of the apoſtles. This reaſon was, according to St. JEROM *, becauſe there would be otherwiſe as many ſchiſms as prieſts, and becauſe every one of theſe, drawing men to his private opinions, which was, I believe, the original meaning of the word hereſy †, the church of CHRIST would be otherwiſe broken. Thoſe aſſemblies, which we call councils, had been convened for the ſame purpoſe, in imitation of that which was held at Jeruſalem, and wherein the ſchiſm breaking out at Antioch, and fomented or authoriſed, at leaſt, by the oppoſition of PETER and PAUL, was compromiſed. But neither of theſe means proved effectual. Biſhops quarrelled, diſputed, intrigued, when they ſtood ſingle: and when they aſſembled in councils, they anathematiſed, that is, they curſed and damned one another. Various goſpels, various epiſtles, were current. They were all received, in ſome of the churches at leaſt. What they contained, that are not come down to us, we know not. But we may well believe that they gave occaſion to diverſity of opinions, ſince we know that the boaſted chain of tradition was not uniform in ſome of the moſt important points, and ſince we know that the diſputes which aroſe in chriſtian congregations, of how great or how little moment ſoever, were puſhed with the utmoſt violence. The diſpute juſt mentioned could not regard eſſentials; for about eſſentials the prince of the apoſtles could

* Adv. LUCIF. † Ad EVAG.

not err, nor would have yielded to a new comer who had never converſed with the Lord, and who could pretend to no more of the gifts and illuminations of the ſpirit than himſelf. Such again was the diſpute about the celebration of eaſter, in which, trifling as it was, much acrimony was ſhewn, many ſynods were held, and a * biſhop of Rome was on the point of excommunicating all the churches of Aſia. I cite no more of this ſort, which regarded chiefly diſcipline and outward obſervances, wherein there were ſome who affected greater evangelical purity, ſome who aſſerted evangelical liberty, and ſome who practiſed a ſort of ſpiritual licentiouſneſs. But I proceed to obſerve, that other diſputes aroſe, wherein the moſt eſſential points of chriſtianity were ſuppoſed to conſiſt. Theſe were diſputes about faith more than works; and tho ſuch of the diſputants, as grew, by time, accident, management, or violence, to be reputed orthodox, damned thoſe who differed from them; yet the points on which they differed were ſo undeterminable by revelation, and ſo incomprehenſible to reaſon, that they remain, after all the miſchief they have done, ſtill undetermined for want of any criterion. Of the diſputes about grace, predeſtination, free-will, election, reprobation, ſanctification, juſtification, and other ſublime theological doctrines which St. PAUL pretended to teach and to explain, and which it were to be wiſhed that no man had preſumed to teach after that great apoſtle, ſince they appeared obſcure even to St. PETER, I ſhall ſay nothing. It will be ſufficient that I ſay ſomething of the opinions that were entertained, and of the diſputes that aroſe, in the primitive church, concerning the divine and ſpiritual natures.

Now concerning theſe particularly, we muſt obſerve that they were derived much more from the heathen than the jewiſh

* VICTOR.

theology.

theology. As much uſe as the latter made of angels in their ſcriptures, and as fond as ſome writers have been to make MICHAEL paſs for a ſecond eſſence in the trinity, and GABRIEL for a third, it has been the opinion of learned men, that the Jews did not know, before the captivity, ſo much as the names they gave to theſe heavenly meſſengers, after it. But to begin higher, and at the firſt principle of all theology. It has been ſhewn, in one of theſe eſſays, on grounds of very great probability, that the one Supreme Being was known to the heathens, that he was acknowledged even by thoſe among whom polytheiſm and idolatry prevailed, and that he was worſhipped too, wherever a crowd of imaginary divinities, that ſuperſtition introduced, did not intercept this worſhip. It muſt be confeſſed, that this happened ſooner or later in all thoſe countries to which our traditions extend. They had ungenerated and generated, ſuperceleſtial and celeſtial gods, whole gods and half gods, and angels and daemons, and genii and ſpirits, and ſouls, in all their ſyſtems of theology. This monſtrous aſſemblage made the object of vulgar adoration. But we know that philoſophers thought more reaſonably at all times, or that their inward doctrine was leſs abſurd than their outward, and that theiſm was taught more purely, and that religion was made more intellectual by thoſe of them who refined on this groſs theology, like PYTHAGORAS and PLATO, whoſe philoſophy had ſpread during ſome centuries before chriſtianity began, and was taught in the famous ſchool of Alexandria, both when it began and long after. From this ſchool there came ſome of the greateſt advocates, and ſome of the greateſt enemies, of chriſtianity, ſome of the greateſt ſaints, and ſome of the greateſt heretics. It could not happen otherwiſe, for many reaſons, and among the reſt for this. The ſect of POTAMO was eſtabliſhed at this time, and the mode of chooſing particular opinions in every ſect, without an entire attachment

ment to any one, was prevalent, as it has been ſaid, I think, already. This mode had a great influence on the chriſtian ſyſtem. Many inſtances of it might be produced. That of ORIGEN may ſtand for all. He was zealous, but learned. He applied himſelf to the ſtudy of the ſcriptures, and took infinite pains to eſtabliſh the text, and fix the ſenſe of them: but he was imbued ſo ſtrongly with cabaliſtical and metaphyſical notions and habits, that he taught many whimſical doctrines, and gave much advantage to men every way his inferiors, to ſuch as JEROM among the antients, and ſuch as BEZA among the moderns.

CHRISTIANS who formed their opinions concerning the Supreme Being in this ſchool, or out of it, on the beſt principles of heathen theology, formed them very different from thoſe of the Jews. They went into extremes on both ſides. The Jews believed not only the monarchy of God over all being, but his unity; and were famous for their averſion to polytheiſm and idolatry, at leaſt after their ſeventy years captivity. If they had not received this faith from their patriarchs, they might have learned it from the Egyptians. Nay their patriarchs might learn it by their commerce with this people. I do not ſay that they did. But this I ſay, that it is more eaſy to ſhew how they might, than divines have found it to give a ſufficient reaſon why MOSES, who took ſo many inſtitutions from Egypt, of much leſs importance and efficacy towards the good government of a rebellious and obſtinate people, neglected to inculcate the doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul, and of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; which other legiſlators, who were not more learned than he was in all the learning of the Egyptians, took from them, and imployed to the beſt purpoſes. But altho the conceptions, which the Jews entertained of the Supreme Being, were thus far very orthodox in the eye of

of reaſon, and altho their pſalmiſts and their prophets ſtrained their imaginations to expreſs the moſt elevated ſentiments of God, of his works, and of the methods of his providence; yet this eternal, this infinite Being was repreſented in their hiſtories, and in the whole ſyſtem of their religion, as a local tutelary deity, carried about in a trunk, or reſiding in a temple; as an ally, who had entered into a covenant with their fathers; as a legiſlator, who had writ their laws with his own hand; as a king, who had actually held the reins of their government; and as an induſtrious magiſtrate, who deſcended into all the particulars of religious and civil adminiſtration, even into the moſt minute and meaneſt. Thus were the Jews accuſtomed to familiariſe themſelves with the Supreme Being, and to imagine that he familiariſed himſelf with them; to think him conſtantly employed about them, as about the nation he had choſen for his elect and favorite people, and to figure him to themſelves receiving their ſacrifices, and liſtening to their prayers, ſometimes, at leaſt, as groſſly as LUCIAN repreſents JUPITER. This will appear in the eye of reaſon to be one extreme.

THE other carries a greater appearance of reverence to the Supreme Being, but is little leſs abſurd: and whilſt the direct tendency of the former notions was to promote ſuperſtition, and to make God the object of it, the indirect tendency of thoſe I am going to mention was to promote polytheiſm and idolatry. It would not be to the purpoſe to collect many things, which pagan monotheiſts have ſaid of the Supreme Being. PLATO himſelf would have done well, notwithſtanding the ſublime expreſſions concerning the divine nature, which are to be found in his writings, to keep the reſerve on this ſubject, which he profeſſes in one of his letters; and upon the whole, the heathen and chriſtian divines both would have done much better than they did, if they had followed more cloſely and more con-

conſtantly the example of SIMONIDES, who owned himſelf unable, after ſeveral delays, to anſwer the queſtion HIERO put to him, "quid aut qualis eſſet Deus." The divine nature cannot be explained by human words; for it cannot be conceived by human ideas: and therefore none but delirious metaphyſicians, who employ words, that impoſe by their ſound and have no determinate ideas affixed to them, will ever attempt this explanation. All that the wit of man can do is to ſpeak cautiouſly and reverently of it, according to thoſe general notices of wiſdom, and power, and majeſty, and all other perfections, which we are able to collect, "à poſteriori," that is, from the works of God, and which ſerve ſtill more to ſhew our ignorance than our knowledge.

SENSIBLE of this, the heathen divines in their ſober moods repreſented the Supreme Being as hidden from us in the depths of darkneſs, or in exceſs of light; a firſt ſelf-exiſtent cauſe of all exiſtence; a real being, but above all eſſence; really intelligent, but above all intelligence; and leſt ſuch notions as theſe ſhould carry men not only to think very truly of the incomprehenſibility of God, but to imagine, according to the groſsneſs of their conceptions, that the Creator was too far removed from his creature, the workman from his work, and the governor from the governed, the heathens invented a chain of beings from God to man, and a more extenſive ſyſtem of divine natures. The Jews had brought the firſt and only God, that they acknowledged, too near to man, and had made him an actor immediately and perſonally, as it were, in the creation and in the government of the world. This was too abſurd for heathen divines. It could never enter into the conception of ſuch as PLATO, for inſtance, who declared, or made the firſt God declare in the Timaeus, that the whole animal world muſt have been neceſſarily immortal, if it had been an imme-

immediate effect of the firſt cauſe. The ſame men would have deemed it a profanation, as well as an abſurdity; and to avoid both one and the other, they aſſumed all thoſe inferior gods, and miniſtring ſpirits, which became the objects of ſo much idolatry.

THE pythagorean and platonic ſchools imagined two ſorts of emanations from the Supreme Being, as it has been hinted. Some of theſe were ſuppoſed to go out of the deity, and to be participating beings. So they were called, and this claſs was numberleſs; ſince it contained all the inferior and younger gods, and all the ſpiritual beings, from the ſoul of the world, which PROCLUS, or one of the ſame mad tribe, calls the elder ſiſter, down to the ſoul of man, which he calls the younger ſiſter. Other emanations, two only, were aſſumed to remain in the deity, and to be emanations, that do not emane, goings out, that do not go out, the Logos or firſt mind, the Pſyche or the firſt ſoul, one of whom was the Nous of ANAXAGORAS, the Demiurgus or the maker of the world, and the other a living ſelf-moving principle, that gives life and motion to all that lives and moves. This was a trinity in the godhead, or this was the godhead, the "To theion," ſuch as ſeveral of the latter platoniſts, who turned dogmatiſts, and laid aſide the name of academicians, conceived it to be. True it is, that ſcarce any two of the heathen trinitarians held the ſame language, no nor any one of them in two different places. It was the language of men, who rambled from one arbitrary hypotheſis to another; and what I am to obſerve particularly here is, that altho they ſpoke ſometimes of the monad, or firſt unity alone, as God, yet they aſcribed often ſo much to the ſecond god, that the firſt became in ſome ſort a non-entity, an abſtract or notional being, a being and no being, without eſſence or nature, becauſe above them, and rather an intelligible than an intelligent principle.

Thus they left, in ſome ſort, no place to the one true God in their conceptions, whilſt they endeavoured to raiſe him above all conception, and whilſt ſome, like the Jews, employed him too much and in too trifling a manner in the formation and government of the world, they baniſhed him almoſt intirely out of the ſyſtem of his works.

I HAVE mentioned theſe notions the rather, becauſe their indirect tendency in their oppoſition to judaiſm is to promote polytheiſm and idolatry, as I ſaid above; and becauſe, notwithſtanding this tendency, they come the neareſt to thoſe that prevailed moſt in the chriſtian church, to thoſe particularly that remained unfixed during three centuries, and that required the greateſt efforts of human authority to reduce them, when they were fixed, into one uniform profeſſion. On all theſe accounts it is proper to ſpeak a little more largely of them.

SECTION XXVII.

I HAVE ſpoken ſomewhere of the ditheiſtical doctrine. It was very antient, no doubt, tho not ſo univerſally profeſſed as PLUTARCH repreſents it to have been. OROMASDES and ARIMANIUS were the good and the bad principle among the Perſians; OSIRIS and TYPHON among the Egyytians. PYTHAGORAS has been ſuſpected, not convicted, of holding this doctrine; for by his Duad, or evil principle, he might mean nothing more than matter: and PLATO did only ſeem to lay ſome foundation for it, by his hypotheſis concerning the original of evil. CERDON or MARCION, or ſome of the gnoſtics, introduced it into chriſtianity, and the ſect who held it continued under the names of manichaeans and paulicians from the third till the end of the ninth century. As repugnant as this doctrine is to our moſt clear and beſt determined ideas, it ſeemed to account for

for the exiſtence of evil as well as good, and for the ſuppoſed irregular, unjuſt diſtribution of them, conſiſtently with the belief of a Supreme Being, infinitely good. This was enough for ſuch arabian and perſian philoſophers, as SCYTHIANUS, TEREBINTHUS, or MANES, and indeed for moſt other philoſophers, in ages when a little ſuperficial plauſibility was ſufficient to convert any hypotheſis, againſt the evidence of reaſon, into a dogma. I have recalled it in this place, becauſe it leads me to make two obſervations, that will caſt ſome light, the ſecond eſpecially, on the obſcure and confuſed theology of which we are going to make mention. The tritheiſtical doctrine appears then to be as antient as the ditheiſtical, that is, more antient than our moſt antient traditions, not only by many direct proofs, but even by this, that the primitive ditheiſts ſeemed to borrow from the other ſyſtem, when, to improve their own, ſome of them altered it ſo far as to place a mediating principle between the good and the evil god. A ſtrange kind of tritheiſm ſurely, or rather a ſyſtem which partook of both, and was neither. We may obſerve in the next place, that the ſecond god of the ditheiſts kept his rank but ill, and was degraded, from a coequality and coeternity with the firſt, to be an inferior, a created, a fallen being. He was, indeed, even in this ſtate a very powerful being; ſince he could tranſport the ſon of God from the deſert to the top of the temple, and afterwards to that of an high mountain. That JESUS had faſted forty days and forty nights, and that he was hungry, ought not to leſſen our admiration of this diabolical ſtrength; ſince we are not to conſider it as bodily, but as ſpiritual ſtrength, and this the ſon of God could exert, as it appeared by his miracles, tho he was in the body. The devil, notwithſtanding this circumſtance, of which he could not be ignorant, confided ſo much in his own ſtrength, and was ſo impudent, that he tempted him, that he tauntingly quoted

paſſages of the ſcripture to him, as JESUS quoted ſome to the devil, and in ſhort, that he inſulted him ſo far as to bid him fall down and worſhip him *. Theſe facts muſt needs give us a very high opinion of the rank which the principal devil held among ſpiritual natures, and may induce us to think, that the devils, over whom the Chriſtians exerciſed ſo much power afterwards, were devils of inferior ſort: ſuch as SCYTHIANUS, TEREBINTHUS, and other magicians uſed to invoke from the tops of houſes; in which exerciſe the two I have named fell down and broke their necks, according to EPIPHANIUS, or one of them at leaſt. But ſtill the devil, the firſt and greateſt of the diabolical ſociety, was a degraded being. He began to be ſo among the pagans. Such the Chriſtians allowed him to be, and he would have paſſed no longer for a firſt principle, nor a god ſelf-exiſtent and independent any where, if the heretics here ſpoken of had not revived and propagated this abominable opinion.

THE very contrary happened in the tritheiſtical ſyſtem, after the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity: and the ſecond and the third divine hypoſtaſes grew by degrees not only into a ſimilitude of nature, a coequality and coeternity, but into a ſameneſs with the firſt. Let us deſcend into ſome particulars, concerning the original and progreſs of this theology. If it is matter of curioſity, it is matter of importance too.

I SAID, that the pagan doctrine of a trinity was more antient than tradition. But if we could believe thoſe ingenious perſons, who find whatever they have a mind to find in the Bible, we ſhould believe it to have been not a pagan but a jewiſh doctrine, not a philoſophical hypotheſis, but a divine revelation, not only older than tradition, but as old as the memorials

* —— Si cadens adoraveris me. MATTH. chap. iv.

MOSES.

Moses had of the creation. We are told in the firſt chapter of Geneſis, that when God cloſed the work of the creation, he ſaid, "let us make man after our image and likeneſs *:" and altho he is made to ſpeak, on the ſame ſubject, in the ſingular number, immediately afterwards, yet chriſtian divines aſſure us, that the father addreſſed himſelf in theſe words to the ſon and holy ghoſt, or to the firſt of them at leaſt, and not to angels, nor any inferior intelligences, as he is ſaid to have done in the Timaeus of Plato. This difference may deſerve our obſervation the more, becauſe Plato in his writings acknowledged a trinity; whereas there is no direct nor clear hint, and much leſs any expreſs declaration, of a trinity in this place, nor in any other part of the writings of Moses. There are indeed, among a multitude of vague and obſcure expreſſions in the books of the Old Teſtament, ſome that ſeem to intimate like this a plurality of divine beings, and theſe have been hawled to ſignify the chriſtian trinity, tho they were too equivocal and too dark to ſerve the purpoſe of leading men to the diſcovery of it, and therefore to ſerve any purpoſe at all. But the divines I have mentioned would do well to conſider, that they have a much leſs right to conclude, that the authors of theſe books, wherein the unity of the godhead is every where eſtabliſhed, meaned to teach a plurality of hypoſtaſes in it which they aſſert, than any man would have to conclude from paſſages, that ſpeak of God in the ſingular number, in books where polytheiſm is conſtantly aſſerted, that theſe authors meaned to teach the unity of the godhead, which theſe divines deny that they did. He who is perſuaded, as I am, that many of thoſe, who were polytheiſts in one ſenſe, were monotheiſts in another, might aſſert the latter propoſition without any abſurdity. But theſe divines cannot aſſert either without the greateſt, and eſpecially ſince they know in how vague and looſe a ſenſe the word

* Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et ſimilitudinem noſtram.

god

god is employed in the ſcriptures, where it ſignifies ſometimes a king or a chief magiſtrate, a prophet or a meſſenger from God, as we find in Exodus *, in SAMUEL †, in the Pſalms §, in the goſpel of St. JOHN ‖, and perhaps in other places.

BUT beſides: if the doctrine of a trinity was found in expreſs terms in the pentateuch, we might be ſurpriſed, with ſome reaſon, that MOSES had taught it to a people ſo ſtrongly addicted, as the Iſraelites were, to the worſhip of many gods, and ſo little able to conceive the equality of three to one, and of one to three, a trinity in an unity, and an unity in a trinity; to a people to whom he would not teach the doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul and of a future ſtate, on account of the many ſuperſtitions which this doctrine had begot in Egypt, as we muſt believe, or believe that he knew nothing of it, or aſſign ſome whimſical reaſon of this omiſſion. But even in this caſe, which ſuppoſes an expreſs mention of the trinity in the pentateuch, we could frame no concluſive argument to prove this doctrine moſaical in it's origin. The religion, as well as government, of the Egyptians, was more antient than that of MOSES. He was learned in both; he borrowed from both; and no man of common ſenſe can believe it more probable, whatever he may pretend, that the ſlaves inſtructed their maſters, than that the maſters inſtructed their ſlaves. If an expreſs mention of the trinity was made in other parts of the Old Teſtament, the argument would be ſtill leſs concluſive, becauſe the Jews had been acquainted with ſchools wherein this doctrine was taught, either as an hidden or public doctrine, long before theſe books were renewed by ESDRAS, I uſe biſhop HUET's ** expreſſion, before ſome of them were writ, per-

* Exod. chap. iv. ver. 16. ibid. chap. vii. ver. 1. † 1 SAM. chap. xxviii. ver. 13. § Pſalm lxxxi. ‖ Goſp. St. JOHN chap. x. ver. 34.
** In Demon. Evang. "inſtauravit."

haps,

haps, and before the canon of them was completed, we know very certainly neither by whom nor when.

If this doctrine was not moſaical, neither was it platonical in it's origin, and much leſs was it invented by the latter platoniſts in imitation of the chriſtian trinity. Plato ſpeaks of one moſt ſimple being, the firſt intelligible. He ſpeaks of a firſt mind, and a firſt ſoul, that ſoul of the world, ſome materials of which were left by God, in the bowl * in which he made it, to be mingled up into the ſouls of men; for it was but reaſonable, that the ſoul of man ſhould be leſs perfect than the ſoul of the univerſe. That Plato was ſincerely a dogmatiſt I am far from believing, and I have on this head more regard to Tully than to St. Austin. But the latter platonicians, who were ſuch, taught this doctrine, like others of his theological and metaphyſical whimſies, for in him and them they were whimſies, in that ſtyle. They were often a little leſs intelligible than he. What we do not underſtand in Plato, we muſt not expect to underſtand better in Plotinus, in Jamblicus, in Proclus, nor in the ſummary of his doctrine by Alcinoüs, nor, in ſhort, in any of thoſe writers whoſe heads have been turned with pythagorean and platonic theology. It was all the unmeaning jargon of egyptian and eaſtern metaphyſics, and it did not acquire more meaning and perſpicuity among the Greeks. On the contrary, I can eaſily perſuade myſelf, that this jargon became ſtill more obſcure by the ſuppoſed improvements of grecian philoſophy. But ſtill the firſt principles of it, and of this doctrine in particular, were more antient than the philoſophical aera in Greece. Strabo ſays, that the colleges of the egyptian prieſts were deſert in his time, and he lived two or three centuries ſooner than Plotinus, Porphyry, and Jamblicus. But there is no color to conclude

* Crater is the word Mars. Ficin. uſes.

from

from hence, that the theology theſe prieſts had taught was loſt and forgot, when theſe philoſophers aroſe among others, and the ſchool of Alexandria floriſhed. There were men ſtill famous for their knowledge, an ABAMMON, an ANEBO for inſtance; and JAMBLICUS, who anſwered PORPHYRY's inquiries in a manner too myſterious not to be genuine, cites the authority of egyptian ſcriptures and traditions. The author of the intellectual ſyſtem mentions a paſſage which we may well take on his word, without conſulting the original, wherein JAMBLICUS ſpeaks plainly of three divine hypoſtaſes in the egyptian theology. EICTON, an indiviſible unity worſhipped in ſilence. EMEPH, the ſame probably as KNEPH, and HAMMON or PTHA, or OSIRIS, an active principle that was called by different names according to the different powers and energies aſcribed to it. Theſe were the PHANES, URANUS, and CRONUS, of ORPHEUS. The three gods praiſed by the pythagoricians. Theſe were the three kings, the firſt good, the firſt mind, and the firſt ſoul, of PLATO. PYTHAGORAS had been inſtructed in the orphic myſteries by AGLAOPHEMUS, and PLATO was the next who received a perfect knowledge of all theſe divine things out of the pythagoric and orphic writings, according to the teſtimony of PROCLUS, in the firſt of his ſix books concerning the platonic philoſophy.

THUS it appears that the notion of a trinity made a part of egyptian theology, and had been communicated to the Greeks even by ORPHEUS, that is, five or ſix centuries before the babylonian captivity, and therefore long before ESDRAS, and long after HERMES. It is not worth while to make any obſervation on theſe dates, which would admit of ſeveral, nor to ſpeak of the zoroaſtrian, chaldaic, or ſamothracian trinities, any farther than to obſerve, that DEMOCRITUS had written a commentary on the ſacred letters of the Babylonians, and that both he and HOSTANES,

HOSTANES, who lived in the time of XERXES, and was himſelf a Chaldaean, had taught the philoſophy of that people or ſect to the Greeks, and that this philoſophy was underſtood to comprehend all the learning of the Eaſt. I proceed rather to obſerve, that this doctrine was taught with ſo much confuſion, that the three gods were ſpoken of ſometimes collectively, and that at other times each of them was ſpoken of alone. The ſecond was ſometimes, and moſt frequently, reputed the maker of this viſible world. He was repreſented at other times to be the firſt god, what light is to the ſun, and I have read that ATHANASIUS employed this compariſon after the heathen divines, tho it be abſurd even to ridicule, in his ſyſtem or in theirs. Sometimes the third hypoſtaſis was ſpoken of as the maker of all things, according to patterns exiſting in the ſecond, and at other times only as a ſoul which animated the material world, and which together with it compoſed one mighty animal. But the general run of opinion was different and more uniform. None of theſe heathen trinitarians had ever imagined three gods, eſſentially one, and one god eſſentially three. Whenever they ſpoke of three hypoſtaſes, they all ſuppoſed them diſtinct and ſubordinate. RAPIN * acknowledges that PROCLUS did diſtinguiſh them ſo; but he aſſerts that PLOTINUS did not. Whence the jeſuit took this, I am ignorant. But it is certain that far from confounding them, or ſaying that they were all one god, PLOTINUS has ſaid the very contrary in many places, and particularly where he approves PLATO's explanation of the doctrine of PARMENIDES, and teaches a firſt, ſecond and third unity in ſubordination.

* Comp. de PLATON et ARISTOTE.

SECTION XXVIII.

SINCE I have ſaid ſo much on this ſubject, I will juſt mention ſome of the notions which theſe pneumatical madmen, Heathens, Jews, and Chriſtians entertained concerning ſpiritual natures inferior to theſe. I obſerve then, that an affectation of inveſtigating and explaining the original and firſt principles of things was the reigning folly of antient philoſophers. Thus the ſyſtems of coſmogony were, like that of HESIOD, ſo many ſyſtems of theogony, and the phyſiology of the univerſe was nothing better than a wild rhapſody of fables and allegories. When theſe would not paſs, except on the ignorant and ſuperſtitious vulgar, they proceeded to a more refined manner of philoſophiſing. What they could not account for by any knowledge they had of the ſenſible world, they endeavoured to account for by the hypotheſes they framed of an intellectual world. The ſenſible phaenomena here below, to ſpeak according to their conceptions, paſſed before them, and diſappeared like the figures of a moving picture. They ſaw nothing permanent, nothing primarily efficient, a multitude of effects, no cauſe. They looked up to the heavens. Their ſenſes were ſtruck. They were ſurpriſed into idolatry firſt, they admired afterwards, and the more they examined, the more they admired. But their reaſon was not ſatisfied, nor the ends of their inquiries attained; their reaſon was not ſatisfied, becauſe they diſcovered nothing but effects above as well as below, no ſelf-exiſtent, ſelf-moving and intelligent cauſes. The ends of their inquiries were not attained, becauſe they inquired after ſuch cauſes as theſe, inſtead of reſolving all ultimately into the infinite wiſdom and power of one firſt efficient cauſe, which is the proper concluſion of every phyſical inquiry. It ſolves every difficulty to a reaſonable mind, that has inquired as far as the phaenomena lead us; and if it did not, the

want

want of a ſufficient reaſon in them would be no reaſon for ſeeking one out of them. It would be a reaſon for ſtopping all inquiry.

HERE we may fix the beginning of metaphyſics. The ends of their reſearches were unattainable. Phyſics could not reach to them. But inſtead of abandoning theſe objects, philoſophers reſolved to change their method, to begin where they had hoped in vain to end, and to invent what they had flattered themſelves that they ſhould diſcover. For this purpoſe, the ideas of PLATO were deviſed, which ſome imagine to be the ſame with the numbers of PYTHAGORAS *. The firſt ſtrangely abſurd, the ſecond quite unintelligible. I ſhall ſpeak, therefore, of the firſt alone. Now the ſecond hypoſtaſis, or the firſt mind, is according to this hypotheſis an architypal world, which contains intelligibly all that is contained ſenſibly in our world. Theſe are the things which truly are, and the phaenomena, which appear realities to ſenſe, are nothing more than their faint, tranſient, and fallacious images. Theſe are the eternal, immutable patterns of things; not only of ſimple ideas which we receive, but of complex ideas which we make; not only of ſubſtances, but of modes and relations. There is a firſt whiteneſs, or a firſt ſweetneſs, as there is a firſt pulchritude, or a firſt gratitude, a firſt bigneſs or a firſt littleneſs. Theſe are, therefore, the true objects of ſcience. Some of the heathen divines ſuppoſed every one of theſe pretended abſtract ideas to be a firſt principle or a divine being, and there are chriſtian divines who ſcruple not to talk of them as of eternal incorporeal eſſences, independent of God himſelf. PLATO erected a myſtic ladder, and he makes SOCRATES adviſe his auditors to climb by it into the region of forms, that is, from opinion to knowledge. MALEBRANCHE has no need of it. Things out of the mind he ſees in God; and concerning things in it, he interrogates the Logos.

* BRUC. de convenientiâ numerorum PYTHAG. cum ideis PLAT.

PYTHAGORAS and PLATO had learned of their eaſtern maſters, and had taught others, to imagine a confuſed multitude of ſpiritual natures beſides theſe, and beſides the three firſt principles, under the different names of gods, angels, daemons, and genii, ſpirits above the moon, good, happy, and immortal; and ſpirits below the moon, where death, miſery, and all that is evil reſides. In this ſyſtem all is intelligible above, all is ſenſible below. Nor was this number of gods and other ſpiritual natures confuſed alone. It was indefinite too, and liable to be increaſed as philoſophical purpoſes, and public or even private ſuperſtition, required. The latter pythagoricians and platoniſts, whom I confound becauſe their doctrines were confounded together, far from ſoftening the groſs and moſt palpable abſurdities of which we have ſpoken, imagined, beſides all theſe beings, and immaterial entities reſiding in the firſt mind, an inconceivable number of eons, that is, of immortal ſpiritual beings proceeding by irradiation, emanation, or ſome other metaphyſical generation, from the firſt being, and inhabiting the heavens and the ſtars. Thus if they did not determine the number of ſpiritual natures in general, as the number of angels was not determined by the Jews, they reduced them into determinate claſſes at leaſt, and made them more apparently, and more immediately, dependent on the three hypoſtaſes that compoſed their deity. Theſe were not called gods indeed, tho they might have paſſed for ſuch of the generated kind at leaſt; and tho there were ſome perſons who held the four firſt eons to be the tetrade of PYTHAGORAS, nay tho ſome were abſurd enough to call the firſt ſelf-exiſting ſpirit an eon, that is an emanation, and therefore a contradiction as monſtrous as that imputed to the ſabellians, who aſſumed, it has been ſaid, that God the father was his own ſon, and God the ſon his own father. But the word god began to be more ſparingly uſed, and

and for that reaſon theſe doctrines might be, as they were, the more eaſily received by many who profeſſed chriſtianity. The Jews, I ſuppoſe, might hold theſe emanations flowing from the divine eſſence, like beams from the ſun, juſt as well as their ten ſuperior lights called ſephiroth; and the Chriſtians might well admit eons into their ſyſtem, ſince they, as well as the Jews, admitted cherubim and ſeraphim, archangels and angels. From the hypotheſis, therefore, of a trinity of ſupreme but ſubordinate gods, ſubordinate to one another, a trinity of ranks or orders of beings was derived. A multitude of unities proceeding from the firſt unity, and ſuperior to the firſt mind; a multitude of minds proceeding from the firſt mind, and ſuperior to the firſt ſoul; a multitude of ſouls proceeding from the firſt ſoul, and ſuperior to all other natures; for they dreamed too of an univerſal nature ſometimes, I know not whether in or out of the Deity, from which all particular natures and all plaſtic principles flowed.

By theſe means ſufficient proviſion was made for ſuperſtition and theological ſpeculations. The ſame preſumption, and the ſame miſapplication and abuſe of human reaſon that miſled the heathen, miſled the chriſtian world, and erected the moſt extravagant hypotheſes, that delirious imaginations could frame, into dogmas concerning divine and ſpiritual nature. The heathen had in their power that rule of inquiry, and that criterion of truth, which God has given to all his rational creatures in the manifeſtation of his nature and attributes, as far as we are able to collect them from the ſyſtem of his works, and from the courſe of his providence. It was therefore a great preſumption, and a great abuſe of reaſon, in thoſe philoſophers, to neglect this rule and this criterion; to inquire often without one, and to judge often againſt the other. But the chriſtian divines have done worſe. They have another rule,

and

and another criterion, beſides theſe, ſupernatural as well as natural religion, the word as well as the works of God. One of theſe might carry their knowledge farther than the other, and it carries indeed this kind of knowledge, ſuch as it is, a great way; but they were inexcuſable when they pretended to acquire any knowledge, on ſuch important and awful ſubjects eſpecially, beyond both. They did it however. Metaphyſical heathens and cabaliſtical Jews impoſed their reſveries on chriſtian fathers; and they impoſed them on the whole chriſtian church, mingled up with thoſe of their own overheated brains.

But there is another cauſe of this pneumatical madneſs to be mentioned. It was not due alone to the fondneſs philoſophers had of ſeeming to account metaphyſically for what they could not account phyſically; it was due likewiſe to a fondneſs of another kind, to a fondneſs of making man paſs for one of thoſe beings that participated of the divine nature. This had long poſſeſſed the heathen theiſts, and it poſſeſſed the Chriſtians with more advantage. Neither of them pretended to ſuch conſtant communications, and familiar converſations with the Supreme Being, as the Jews did; tho both of them boaſted of divine influences, of inſpirations, and of revelations made to them ſleeping and waking. But then both of them boaſted a natural, tho diſtant relation with the Supreme Being, not only the moral relation of creatures to their Creator, but the natural relation of deſcendants to their common anceſtor, a cognation, as Cudworth calls it, a ſort of ſpiritual conſanguinity. Several hypotheſes had lengthened the chain of being very far from God downwards: and as divinity had been hawled down, humanity had been hoiſted up, ſometimes by groſs and corporeal repreſentations, ſometimes by ſuch as were more refined and ſpiritual. Man was made after the image of God in more ſyſtems than one, or rather God was made

made after the image of man. The anthropomorphite hereſy repreſented him with all the members, the ſhape and figure of an human body; and how the idolatrous heathens repreſented all their gods, and none more than JUPITER himſelf, in human bodies, and in human operations, is enough known. But there were other ſyſtems in which the ſimilitude and natural relation between God and man were repreſented under images more refined and ſpiritual.

IN the jewiſh ſyſtem, however, we underſtand the words of MOSES, the Supreme Being made the body of man of the dirt of the earth. But the human ſoul was a portion of divine breath, "divinae particula aurae." God breathed it into his face, and he became a living ſoul *; as God is ſaid, in ſcripture language, to be the living God. In the platonic ſyſtem, inferior intelligences were commiſſioned to make the whole animal kind, leſt they ſhould have been all immortal; but God reſerved to himſelf the ſoul of man, which he made of the ſame ſubſtance as the ſoul of the univerſe, only a little leſs perfect, as it has been ſaid. In the ſyſtem we ſpeak of, the divinity is allied to humanity as effectually as the pride of man could deſire, as effectually as in either of theſe. We aſſume, and the latter platonicians as well as their founder aſſumed, that man is compounded of body and ſoul. As PLATO aſſerted, that all ſouls were made at once, ſo they aſſerted, that all ſouls were made of the ſame nature. Human ſouls, therefore, proceeding from the firſt ſoul, which was ſometimes confounded with, and ſometimes diſtinguiſhed from the ſoul of the univerſe, and this ſoul being ſuperior to all natures, except the minds proceeding from the firſt mind, and the unities proceeding from the firſt unity, the relation between God and man was not very remote; whether

* Inſpiravit in faciem ejus ſpiraculum vitae, et factus eſt homo in animam viventem.

they

they thought that the three hypoſtaſes compoſed one deity, as two ſubſtances compoſed one man; or whether they thought, that the three were diſtinct ſubordinate ſubſiſtencies, and the ſoul the loweſt of them. The relation, I ſay, was not very remote either way; and theſe philoſophers might think their hypotheſis the more decent for not making this relation cloſer. PROCLUS therefore, or PLOTINUS, or one of that tribe, had reaſon, you ſee, on this plan of theology to call the ſoul of the world the elder ſiſter of the human ſoul: and if ORIGEN did not come fully up to all theſe extravagances, he came very near to them, when he aſſerted, that there was no difference, but that of merit, between the ſouls of archangels and angels, of devils and of men. The ſoul of CHRIST, according to this father, who was perhaps the greateſt of the fathers, was of the ſame nature as all other rational ſouls, and was inſeparably united with God, or made one with the word *, only on account of ſuperior merit in a pre-exiſting ſtate.

THUS human pride, as well as human curioſity, was indulged by heathen philoſophers and by platoniſing Chriſtians. They grew up into a ſort of pneumatical madneſs, or metaphyſics were the dotage of phyſics: take which of the images you pleaſe. What theſe wild or dreaming philoſophers could not do by any hypotheſis about body, they attempted to do by the hypotheſis of a ſoul: and ſince they could not make man participant of the divine nature by his body, however animated up to rationality, or with whatever adventitious powers they might ſuppoſe it endued, they thought fit to add a diſtinct ſpiritual to his corporeal ſubſtance, and to aſſume him to be a compound of both. A great variety of hypotheſes was built on this one; but immortality was common to them all.

* ——inſeparabilem cum Deo fecerit unitatem——cum Verbo Dei unum efficitur. ORIG. de princip. lib. 1.

In

In all of them, man was allied to God by ſome metaphyſical genealogy: and even thoſe of them, which, giving him immortality, expoſed him to eternal damnation by it, were fondly received. He who conſiders what our manner of knowing is, what the faculties of our minds are, what the means we have of acquiring knowledge are; and how uncertain, how precarious, how confined it is in the higheſt degree of it; will think the ſoul as unfit to be participant of the divine nature as the body. Nay PLATO, whom I quote on theſe occaſions, "inſtar "omnium," was ſo little able to prove the exiſtence and immortality of the ſoul, and talked ſo much nonſenſe about the eſſence and eſſential properties of it, that he was obliged to have recourſe from natural to moral arguments, which are indeed more plauſible, but not more concluſive.

WHEN theſe notions were once eſtabliſhed, it was no hard matter to perſuade men, nay it was no hard matter for thoſe, who had a diſpoſition and a temper of brain prone to enthuſiaſm, to perſuade themſelves, that by various methods of purification, and by intenſe meditation, which were in truth ſo many methods of growing mad, they could abſtract themſelves from all ſenſible objects, wrap themſelves up in pure intellect, and be united to the Supreme Being. This madneſs has prevailed, and ſtill prevails, under ſome form or other, and with little difference, in the Eaſt and in the Weſt, among Chriſtians and heathens, among the orthodox and heretics. I need not quote inſtances. They have been frequent and notorious in China, in the Eaſt Indies, and in Europe. PYTHAGORAS and PLATO taught, that the ſupreme good of men was to be like God, and to be gods at laſt. Such opinions as theſe were held, with ſome variety of expreſſion more than of ſubſtance, by the manichaeans and other heretics. The moſt orthodox fathers ſpoke of the communion of men with God, as of a my-

ſtery unknown indeed to men and angels till it was revealed, but ſuſpected by the heathen philoſophers, who were impelled to deſire it by a natural inſtinct. A ſtrange aſſertion this muſt appear, and equally falſe in every part. The communion of man with God was not a ſuſpicion, it was a dogma, true or falſe, and an article of the platonic faith? for PLATO too required faith in traditional doctrines. It was not any particular inſtinct, that impelled the heathen to deſire this communion, it was their pride and abſurdity, the very human affections and paſſions from which theſe men pretended to be freed, that produced this preſumptuous deſire.

SUCH extravagant doctrines concerning divine and ſpiritual natures being taught with much confuſion in the ſchools of heathen theology, they could not fail to be taught in thoſe of chriſtianity with the ſame confuſion, and to produce all the different opinions, that divided the chriſtian church. None of them knew very diſtinctly what they meaned by the word ſpirit and ſpiritual ſubſtance, which were ſo often in their mouths. That they meaned in general nothing more than breath, like animal breath, and a thin ſubtile matter that eſcaped human ſight in the ordinary way of ſeeing, is evident. They ſaid, after ZOROASTER and the magi, that God was original light, or an intelligent fire. They ſaid, that this light was incorporeal, and yet they talked of it in ſuch a manner as deſcribed a very corporeal light, inviſible, however, to all eyes that were not fortified like thoſe that enjoy the beatific viſion. In ſhort, ſpirituality did not imply incorporeity, and if one of thoſe great divines was at hand to be aſked what he meaned by ſpiritual ſubſtance, he would anſwer in ſome metaphyſical jargon; he would tell us, perhaps, that it is a ſubſtance "ab eſ- "ſentialitate ſucciſa," which are words I have read, but cannot tranſlate.

SEC-

SECTION XXIX.

But it is time I ſhould return to ſpeak of the trinity, and to ſhew what diſcordant opinions aroſe about it among the Chriſtians; for among the heathens, tho there were different opinions, yet it was rather a ſecret doctrine, in which philoſophers inſtructed their ſcholars behind the curtain, than a doctrine which they publiſhed to all men indifferently. Now it is impoſſible to conceive any thing more monſtrous than ſome of theſe opinions, or more litigated, or longer unſettled than others. The leaſt we have to obſerve of this kind is about the firſt hypoſtaſis, and yet ſomething of this kind is to be obſerved about that. For inſtance, tho we cannot explain God's manner of being, and tho to attempt it is unpardonable preſumption, yet we may, and we muſt aſſert, that he is not a ſyſtem of matter; becauſe there ariſe, from the contrary ſuppoſition, a multitude of abſurdities, that cannot deſtroy the demonſtration of his exiſtence, but that are inconſiſtent with it: notwithſtanding which, the fathers of the church ſpoke of him ſometimes, in ſuch terms, that to make out any ſenſe in what they ſaid, we muſt underſtand them to have thought him material, at leaſt not immaterial, and what they thought him then it is not poſſible to conceive.

But the various doctrines that were taught about the ſecond and third hypoſtaſis, the ſecond eſpecially, are ſtill more beyond all conception extravagant and profane. Concerning theſe, and one or two more, it is neceſſary, that I ſhould deſcend into ſome particulars, in order to ſhew, not only that private authority has impoſed private opinions, that is, hereſies, but that public authority, the authority of the whole chriſtian church, has impoſed opinions which are, therefore, deemed

orthodox; altho many of them are as abſurd as any of thoſe which are deemed heretical, many of them as diſputable, many of them as little warranted by the goſpel, and many of them as incompatible with true theiſm; becauſe if they do not deny God, they do ſomething as bad, nay worſe in PLUTARCH's ſenſe, and, in common ſenſe, they defame him. From a conſideration of ſome few of theſe opinions and doctrines, it will appear how unſafely we truſt, in matters of religion, to the authority of other men, which may lead us, and has led all thoſe who have ſubmitted to it, under pretence of making them better Chriſtians, to be little if at all better than atheiſts. From a contemplation of the conſequences of theſe opinions and doctrines, it will appear that theology has made chriſtianity ridiculous to men of ſenſe, I mean the chriſtianity that has been eſtabliſhed by eccleſiaſtical and civil authority, and a perpetual bone of contention to fools. It will appear that the atheiſtical objection to religion, which has been mentioned, groundleſs as it is, receives a color from the inventions and the conduct of that order of men, who have arrogated to themſelves, excluſively of all others, the name and the power of a church, and whom Chriſtians are accuſtomed to think and to call the church.

THERE have been reports, for ſuch ſtories deſerve to be eſteemed no more, that SIMON, who was a Samaritan, declared himſelf among that people to be the father, among the Jews to be the ſon, and among the Gentiles to be the holy ghoſt; that he paſſed the operations of his magical art for miracles, and that he broke his neck at laſt in attempting to fly before NERO, notwithſtanding which he was adored at Rome. This latter circumſtance, indeed, was founded on a blunder that has been ſince detected; tho it impoſed on JUSTIN the martyr in the ſecond century, and which is much more ſtrange, on ERASMUS

MUS * in the ſixteenth. MONTANUS pretended to be the paraclete in the third century; or that God who had preached and ſuffered in CHRIST, inhabited by the holy ghoſt in him. The excuſe he made for coming ſo late, when JESUS had promiſed that he ſhould come ſo much ſooner, was the unpreparedneſs of the world to receive any ſooner that auſterity of religious obſervances which he preſcribed and practiſed. They were incredibly great, and ſuch as may render it probable that this impoſtor died the death of the traytor JUDAS, that he hanged himſelf in a fit of deſpair, as chriſtian writers have affirmed. Such tales as theſe would not deſerve to be mentioned, if they did not ſerve to ſhew the fanatical ſpirit of thoſe ages, and to take off our wonder at all the hereſies that aroſe in the chriſtian church, by obſerving how eaſy it was to ſuppoſe a divine miſſion, or even to aſſume in opinion a divine nature. The appearance of falſe prophets, as well as their ſucceſs in ſeducing, had been foretold; and it was the character of the times which encouraged one, and promoted the other.

THESE falſe prophets were very numerous, and their ſucceſs very various. But there was no article of chriſtian faith and doctrine which admitted of ſo much doubt and diſpute as the divinity of CHRIST firſt, and his rank in the godhead afterwards. CERINTHUS denied his divine nature. MENANDER aſſerted that he was a true man. SATURNINUS that he was only the ſhadow and appearance of a man. BASILIDES that the CHRIST did not ſuffer, but that he took the form of another, of SIMON of Cyrene, I think, who ſuffered under his form whilſt he ſtood by and laughed at his own ſuppoſed crucifixion. EBION maintained, like MENANDER, that CHRIST was a mere man, the ſon of JOSEPH. In calling him a good or a juſt man, he had the authority of St. PETER on his ſide, who calls him ſo in one place

* Vid. Ep. 831. in IRENAEUM.

of

of the Acts, and even this he did not want; but in denying his reſurrection from the dead, as he did when he affirmed that the body of CHRIST remained in the grave, tho his ſoul went to heaven, he had this great apoſtolical authority againſt him *. In fine, and to fill up the meaſure of heretical phrenſy, the ſethites held that the ſame perſon had been SETH firſt, and was JESUS afterwards; and the ophitae, as they were called, that he had been the ſerpent who tempted EVE; ſo that he, who redeemed mankind by his blood, had made redemption neceſſary by his wiles, according to theſe madmen.

THAT there were no madmen at the ſame time among the beſt and moſt orthodox Chriſtians, if it may be ſaid with truth that any orthodox belief was ſettled ſo ſoon, we muſt not believe. There were many ſuch, and the proofs are at hand, both in their writings, and much more in the anecdotes concerning them. But that which deſerves our particular obſervation is, that the madneſs of thoſe who are reputed orthodox never ran ſo high, as it did after the orthodox belief on this great article had been ſettled; if propoſitions, the very terms of which are ſometimes ambiguous and ſometimes quite unintelligible, may be ſaid to have been ſettled. Certain it is, that after this the orthodox fathers held ſuch language about the incarnation of CHRIST, as many of thoſe who were reputed heretics would have ſcrupled modeſtly and piouſly to have uſed. Theſe words, the ſon of God, were underſtood figuratively, I preſume, and not literally in the caſe of Foë, who aſſumed this appellation in India a thouſand years before the coming of CHRIST, and in the caſe of ZOROASTER, who aſſumed it in Perſia, perhaps, as antiently. They muſt have been underſtood even thus very falſely, in both thoſe caſes. But they might have been ſo underſtood, with ſome propriety of figure, in the caſe of CHRIST,

* ——Virum probatum à Deo, juſtum à mortuis ſuſcitatum.

who

who was at leaſt the Meſſiah promiſed by God, foretold by the prophets, and ſent in due time. If this had been the judgment of the church, the principal difficulties about his incarnation had been anticipated, as they were by the neſtorians, who held that there were two perſons, and not two natures only, in CHRIST, and who denied that the virgin was the mother of God. But the church having determined that theſe words, the ſon of God, ſhould be taken in their literal ſenſe, it is aſtoniſhing to conſider what profanations followed concerning this ſecond generation of the ſon; for the firſt had been before all worlds, that is, from all eternity. Theſe profanations collected from the moſt approved writers alone, to ſay nothing of the creeds that are ſo ſolemnly recited in chriſtian churches, would fill a volume. I ſhall mention a few only, which they, who are at all converſant in the writings of antient and modern divines, will acknowledge to be fairly quoted.

IT has been ſaid then by the moſt orthodox *, piouſly and reverently too, as they and other divines aſſure us, "that the "father having choſen the virgin MARY for this ſecond gene- "ration of the ſon, he loved her as his ſpouſe; he employed "the angel GABRIEL, whom he made his pronubus or para- "nymphus, that is, his brideman, to procure her conſent, "without which there can be no lawful marriage; and having "obtained it, his virtue overſhadowed her, which he tem- "pered ſo that her human nature might be able to ſupport the "divine embracement. In this private embracement, ſhe con- "ceived, the holy ſpirit flowing into her, and producing the "effect of human ſeed. Thus the child partook of the two "natures of his parents, the divine nature of his father, and "the human nature of his mother." In ſuch groſs terms, and under ſuch groſs images, has the myſtery of the incarnation

* ERAS. adv. ep. LUTHERI.

been

been explained. The words of St. AMBROSE are too obſcene to be tranſlated. Take them in latin therefore. " Non enim, ſays this modeſt archbiſhop, " virilis coitus vulvae virginalis " ſecreta reſeravit, ſed immaculatum ſemen inviolabili utero " ſpiritus ſanctus infudit." St. AUSTIN ſoftens the terms, and changes the image a little. But if he does not appear quite ſo obſcene, he muſt appear at leaſt as mad as the others. " God " ſpoke by his angel, ſays this ſaint, and the virgin was got " with child by the ear *." There were thoſe who aſſerted that CHRIST did not aſſume his body in the virgin's womb, but that he brought it from heaven, and paſſed thro her as water paſſes thro a pipe †. They were called heretics for their pains, and yet ſurely that doctrine might have been ſung or ſaid in the churches, as decently and with as much edification, as thoſe hymns were, in one of which it was ſaid, that the virgin conceived, " non ex virili ſemine, ſed myſtico ſpiramine," and in the other, that the Word or Logos entered at her ear, " et exi- " vit per auream portam."

SUCH extravagant and profane notions and expreſſions, as have been laſt mentioned, came into faſhion chiefly after the nicaean council, which CONSTANTINE thought it neceſſary to convene. How ill he judged, and how ill his ſucceſſors judged on ſimilar occaſions, long and woful experience has manifeſted. What paſſed before his time ſhewed, that attempts to explain divine myſteries muſt be of neceſſity endleſs; and what paſſed in and after his time, that it is to no purpoſe, at leaſt to no good purpoſe, to impoſe any authoriſed definitions of them. What revelation leaves a myſtery muſt remain ſuch: and there cannot be a greater abſurdity than to imagine that human authority, call it how you pleaſe, ought to determine, or will determine,

* Deus loquebatur per ſuum angelum, et virgo per aurem impregnabatur.
† AUG. de tem. ſerm. 22.

to

to ſubmiſſion thoſe who think that ſuch definitions are not conformable to their true criterion, which is the revelation itſelf. The only difference is this. The men who diſpute and wrangle on ſuch points as theſe, wherein neither morality nor good government are concerned, cannot do much hurt, if they are left to diſpute and wrangle among themſelves; whereas, if public authority takes notice of them ſo far as to meddle in their quarrels, and to decide any way, civil diſorders are ſure to follow, and the blood of nations is ſpilled in wars and maſſacres, to extinguiſh a flame which ſome hot-headed prieſt, or delirious metaphyſician, has kindled, and which it does not extinguiſh neither.

WHAT revelation leaves a myſtery muſt remain ſuch: and if any thing was ever left a myſtery, the doctrine of the trinity was ſo. CHRIST had no where called himſelf God. His apoſtles called him Lord *. PETER had once declared him to be a man: and PAUL preaching to the Athenians ſpeaks of him rather as a man than as God. He makes no mention of the ſon of God, nor of the holy ghoſt. Theſe inconſiſtent writers talk often a different language on the ſame ſubject, and contradict in one place what they have ſaid in another. How they came to do ſo in this caſe, let others account; but let them account for this conduct of the apoſtles better than the greateſt antient and modern divines have done. According to them, PETER was afraid of ſcandaliſing the Jews. The Jews believed one God, had never heard of the ſon, nor holy ghoſt, and would have been revolted againſt chriſtianity more than they were, if they had heard the man, whom they had ſeen crucified and buried, called God. PAUL was afraid of confirming the Gentiles in their polytheiſm, by preaching to them that CHRIST was God. The prudence of this method, by which the young in CHRIST were fed with

* ERAS. ubi ſupra.

milk, and thoſe of riper years with ſolid food, for the whole myſtery was revealed to them, has been extremely applauded by the moſt approved doctors of the church. I am unwilling, however, to take this for the reaſon of the conduct which the two apoſtles held. It ſavours too much of an outward and inward doctrine, the double dealing of pagan divines. It ſeems unworthy of men commiſſioned by CHRIST, inſpired by the holy ghoſt, and able to inforce all they taught by miracles. It bears too near a reſemblance to the unrighteous cunning of the jeſuits, who are ſaid to conceal the humiliation and paſſion of the ſaviour from their neophites in China. But whatever reaſon the apoſtles had for it, which they who boaſt to be their ſucceſſors have no right to determine, this was their conduct. The divinity of the Word grew by ſlow degrees into general belief among Chriſtians: the divinity of the holy ghoſt by degrees ſtill ſlower, and the coequality and conſubſtantiality of the three hypoſtaſes laſt of all. It fared with the ſon, in the firſt ages of chriſtianity, much as it has fared ſince with the mother of God. Strong figurative expreſſions, which the apoſtles employed on ſome, which other doctors and ſaints employed on all occaſions, and which were animated, doubtleſs, by the oppoſition of heathens, Jews and heretics, might contribute to exalt the ſon at the expence of the father's ſupremacy; as we know very certainly that by ſuch means and on ſuch motives as theſe the virgin acquired the title of deipara, to whom, if ſhe is not a goddeſs avowed in expreſs terms, divine honors are paid, and her interceſſion is implored with the father and the ſon. She is ſo plainly diſtinguiſhed from both, that her interceſſion with either carries more propriety along with it, than the interceſſion of the ſon with the father; ſince theſe two conſubſtantial perſons cannot be intelligibly diſtinguiſhed from one another, and ſince it is of the utmoſt abſurdity to advance that the ſame perſon intercedes with himſelf.

WHAT

WHAT has been ſaid will appear evidently true, if we look into the anecdotes of the apoſtolical and following ages; or if we conſult, with due diſcernment, thoſe who have made them their ſtudy. Many of the primitive Chriſtians, ſtruck with religious awe, had a very reaſonable ſcruple of uſing any appellations which were not contained in the ſcriptures. Many of them dared not give that of the true God to CHRIST before the nicaean council, nor ſeveral after it: and even the moſt orthodox, who ſcrupled not to call him very God of very God, begotten not made, when the council had pronounced, were ſtill afraid to give this appellation to the holy ghoſt. Nay from the time that the macedonians were condemned ſoon after the arians, in another council, and even to this hour, the holy ghoſt has not been deemed God by generation, but by proceſſion or ſpiration, that is, by the breathing of the father thro the ſon, or by the joint breathing of the father and the ſon; of which difference in an identity of nature we muſt be content to ſay what ERASMUS ſaid, "ſatis eſt credere." In ſhort, the orthodox doctrine of the trinity was never taught explicitly and poſitively by any divine authority. It was a vague opinion in heathen theology, which intended no more, perhaps, than to perſonify the wiſdom and goodneſs of the ſupreme omnipotent Being. It has been a theological diſpute in all ages among Chriſtians, and the preciſe definition, according to which we are obliged to profeſs that we believe it, is founded on authority intirely human, and therefore undeniably fallible, imperial and eccleſiaſtical authority.

IF it be ſaid, that the deciſions in favor of the ſecond and third hypoſtaſes have been made by councils, under the influence of the holy ghoſt, I ſhall only ſay, the queſtion is begged ridiculouſly, when the influence of the holy ghoſt is ſuppoſed

to prove the very point in diſpute, his divinity; and that they, therefore, muſt have no ſmall ſhare of ſtupidity, of ignorance, and effrontery, who can inſiſt on ſuch an anſwer in this age. If it be ſaid that the councils, which condemned the opinions of PAUL of Samoſata, of SABELLIUS, of ARIUS, of PHOTINUS, and of other heretics, were guided, in the canons they made, and the anathemas they pronounced, by the unerring rule of ſcripture and uniform tradition; I ſhall only aſk, what that ſcripture was? It was not the old Teſtament moſt ſurely; for there is no reaſon to allow that this Teſtament contains any notices of the trinity. Was it the new Teſtament? But we may defy the ableſt chemiſt, that ever worked on thoſe materials, to extract from them ſuch a trinity, as that is which the chriſtian church acknowledges. Paſſages that ſeem favorable to it, in part, may be, as they have been, produced. But then paſſages that are really inconſiſtent with it, in the whole, may be, as they have been, oppoſed to theſe: and the famous adjective homoüſios will not be found conſecrated by ſcripture language; tho even this word does not ſignify very determinately what it has been applied to ſignify, if identity alone be the greateſt, and ſimilitude but a leſs unity, as the learned ſay *. As little grounds are there, in any part of the new Teſtament, even in the epiſtles of St. PAUL, for that impudent analyſis which ſchool divines and others have preſumed to make of the Deity when they have talked ſo much nonſenſe about proceſſions or emanations, perſons, relations, notions, or terms, and the indwelling of theſe divine beings in one another. Certain figurative and vague expreſſions, of which there are many, have been picked up here and there, and have been dragged to countenance, if that was poſſible, ſuch opinions. Theology has ſolemniſed the reſveries of enthuſiaſm in many inſtances. Let

* ——Conſimilis eſſentia. ERAS. Identitas maxima eſt unitas: minor unitas eſt ſimilitudo. MART. Lexic.

me

me quote one that occurs immediately to me. IGNATIUS, diſciple of St. JOHN, and biſhop of Antioch, was brought before TRAJAN. The emperor inquired who he was. The ſaint anſwered, that he was one who had gained the friendſhip of the ſon of God, whom he carried about in his breaſt; as he might well do, ſince it was written, "I will dwell and walk in them." TRAJAN condemned this theophorus, or god-carrier, to be expoſed to wild beaſts at Rome. It is not neceſſary, that I ſhould make any applications of this ſtory to what I have ſaid of enthuſiaſm and theology. Almoſt daily experience will make them for me.

NOT only the ſcriptures, which are come down to us, are very far from being vouchers of the trinity we profeſs to believe; but we may aſſure ourſelves, that many of the ſcriptures and traditions, that obtained credit in the primitive ages of chriſtianity, depoſed againſt this trinity. Scriptures ſtood in oppoſition to ſcriptures, and tradition was not uniform. There were various goſpels, and various epiſtles. All theſe were compoſed and altered, received and rejected, according to the different traditions, and the different ſyſtems of evangelical hiſtory and doctrine, that prevailed in different places, and among different perſons. Thus, for inſtance, EPIPHANIUS owns, that SABELLIUS, who denied any diſtinction of perſons in the godhead, took his doctrine from the goſpel of the Egyptians; and the ſocinians of our age may boaſt, that they derive their pedigree from PAUL of Samoſata, a great biſhop of the third century. This century, the latter part of it eſpecially, may be included in that character which ERASMUS gives of the fourth, and which will ſuit ſome others. "It was matter of ingenuity "to be a Chriſtian. Faith was rather in the writings than in "the minds of men: and there were almoſt as many creeds as "perſons that profeſſed chriſtianity." The diſputes concerning the

the divinity of CHRIST continued from the apoſtolical days to theſe, without any oecumenical deciſion. Then, indeed, there was one given by the council of Nicaea, which did not, however, decide, for a long time, nor even at laſt, by ſcripture and tradition, but by dint of perſecution, and by the force of the ſecular arm.

IT has been ſaid, that the greateſt lights, which appeared in the chriſtian church after the apoſtles, appeared in and about the fourth century, to the end of which century, at leaſt, I think that we proteſtants concur, not very wiſely, with you papiſts in reverencing fathers and councils. This judgment I ſhall not contradict, however, on the preſent occaſion. But then we muſt make it more impartially than it is generally made. For inſtance, ATHANASIUS, GREGORY of Nazianze, CHRYSOSTOM, AMBROSIUS, AUGUSTIN, JEROM, were men of ſome parts and learning with extraordinary zeal. But ſo were ARIUS, EUSEBIUS of Nicomedia, the other EUSEBIUS of Caeſarea, PHOTINUS, and MACEDONIUS. That ſuch men as theſe ſhould be divided, in their opinions concerning the trinity, cannot ſeem ſtrange to any perſon who conſiders the nature of this doctrine, how it came into the church, how it grew up there, and how open to diſpute it remained three hundred years after CHRIST. To believe three gods, three ſubſtances eſſentially different, or three ſubſiſtencies, as they were called by ſome, in the god-head, diſtinct and ſubordinate, the ſecond to the firſt, and the third to the ſecond, was not hard on the principles of heathen theology, in which ſuch a trinity had been taught. But on the principles of jewiſh and chriſtian theology, ſuch a belief could not be admitted without manifeſt inconſiſtency; and it is not conceivable, that PHILO could reconcile PLATO and MOSES, when he talked of a ſecond god. To ſave this inconſiſtency, and to avoid as much as poſſible all appearance of poly-

polytheiſm, ſeveral expedients were deviſed. Some, like SABELLIUS and his maſter NOËTUS, denied a diſtinction of perſons in the god-head: ſo that God the father was, in the ſyſtem of theſe heretics, as it is ſaid, his own ſon, and God the ſon his own father; nay the father, the ſon, and the holy ghoſt ſuffered together in the paſſion and perſon of CHRIST, ſince they were but one perſon under three notions and appellations. Some, like PAUL of Samoſata before the nicaean council, and PHOTINUS at that time, or immediately after it, maintained, that JESUS was called the ſon of God only on account of his ſanctity; that the word deſcended on him, and then returned to the father; and that he did not commence the CHRIST, till he had been baptiſed in the Jordan.

As ſome were afraid of deſtroying the unity by the trinity, others were afraid of deſtroying the trinity by the unity. ARIUS thought to ſave both, by oppoſing the unitarians, who took away all diſtinction of perſons, and the trinitarians, who held, that they were all equal. He made the diſtinction of perſons as ſtrong as he could, in contradiction to the former; and he was ſo far from acceding to the latter, that he denied the ſon to be either in rank or nature equal to the father, and the holy ghoſt to be ſo even to the ſon. The ſtrict trinitarians, who became afterwards the ſole orthodox, might hold the father to be alone eternal in this ſenſe, "quod careat origine;" for "duae perſonae ab ipſo ſunt, ipſe à nullo." So HILARIUS expreſſed himſelf. But he and the reſt of them believed an eternal generation of the ſon, and proceſſion of the holy ſpirit, who had no beginning in time, tho they had an original in nature, the nature of the father. The arians, on the other hand, denied this community of nature, held the father alone to be the Supreme God, and the ſon to be the firſt of all creatures, but a created being. If this doctrine had become orthodox,

as

as it did very nearly, notwithſtanding the deciſion of the nicaean council, the macedonians would have formed no ſect. The divinity of the ſecond hypoſtaſis failing, that of the third would have fallen of courſe; which it is plain that ARIUS ſaw, when he urged nothing, and the nicaean council added nothing to the creed concerning the holy ghoſt. But the heretics of thoſe days were ſo afraid of admitting any coequality with the Supreme Being, that they oppoſed the divinity of the third hypoſtaſis, even after that of the ſecond had been eſtabliſhed. They were eaſily defeated. The ſame ſort of proof as had ſerved in one diſpute ſerved in the other: and tho the orthodox themſelves diſtinguiſhed generation from proceſſion, yet the ſcripture joining the ſon and the holy ghoſt ſo often together, and CHRIST having ordered baptiſm to be adminiſtered in the name of the holy ghoſt as well as of the father and the ſon, the divinity of the holy ghoſt was confirmed, and theſe councils employed, very wiſely, authority inſtead of argument. It was impoſſible, indeed, to ſhew, by any ſubtilty of logic, that this doctrine was not polytheiſtical; ſince the admiſſion of three, or of three hundred gods, is equally ſo. There remained, therefore, nothing to be done, but to make a myſtery where they found none: and having decreed, that there are three gods, to decree at the ſame time that there is but one; for ſo the athanaſian doctrine muſt ſound to every man who does not comprehend, and that is every man living, all the profound metaphyſics that have been employed to diſtinguiſh away the apparent contradiction, unleſs he give his underſtanding up to a jargon of words, and can fancy he believes without any clear and diſtinct ideas.

IN this manner was the fundamental article of chriſtianity impoſed at firſt, without a plain and harmonical concurrence of the ſcriptures, or of tradition; tho ſuch a concurrence, at leaſt, was neceſſary to make it a revealed doctrine, and of divine

vine obligation. It continues to be impoſed ſtill: and there is but too much reaſon to apprehend, that theſe theological attempts, to perſuade mankind that three diſtinct perſons in the godhead make but one God, have induced ſome to believe that there is no God at all: juſt as the pretenſions of heathen philoſophers, to knowledge really unattainable, induced ſeveral to aſſert, that there is no knowledge at all. If I was to write the hiſtory of arianiſm, it would be a part of my ſubject to ſhew, with how much difficulty the orthodox doctrine prevailed againſt it; how it revived often even under CONSTANTINE, much more under ſome of his ſucceſſors; and was, at laſt, drowned in the blood of thoſe who profeſſed it. The athanaſians and the arians were, in ſome reſpects, like the praſini and the veneti. The principal difference between the firſt was in the words they uſed, and between the laſt in the colors they wore. Neither the divines, nor the chariot drivers, were left to contend by themſelves in the ſchools, and in the circus. Men, women, children, all the world, took part on one ſide or the other. The ſtate was diſordered by the circenſian, and the church and the ſtate both by the ſynodical conteſts. The civil power, which ſhould have put both down, kept both up: and magiſtrates were as partial in one caſe, and as bigot in the other, as the vulgar. It were to be wiſhed, that the compariſon would hold in one circumſtance more; for, in the reign of JUSTINIAN, the praſini and the veneti were both aboliſhed.

SECTION XXX.

THE accounts we have of ATHANASIUS and of ARIUS are come to us in the writings of the former, and of thoſe of the ſame party, and, therefore, may be deemed extremely partial, as they are extremely violent: and yet very little ſagacity is ne-

ceſſary to diſcover, even in them, that the ſaint had leſs moderation, and not leſs ambition, than the heretic; that he had the ſpirit of intrigue, as much as EUSEBIUS of Nicomedia; and that he was one of thoſe churchmen, whom pride and obſtinacy of temper, under the name of zeal, render equally fit to perſecute, and to bear perſecution. The authority of the perſons, who were at the head of this diſpute, deſerves, in a word, no conſideration. But as the athanaſian doctrine was confirmed by the firſt and all other councils, except a very few, it may be proper to inquire what regard theſe councils deſerve. Now as to that, we may ſay boldly, becauſe we can prove invincibly, that they deſerve none; whether we judge of them analogouſly to thoſe that have been held in our time, or near it, or whether we judge of theſe primitive councils by what we know of them from cotemporary, and the moſt orthodox authority.

THE firſt attempt to ſilence ARIUS, and to condemn his doctrine, was in a provincial council held at Alexandria. The letters OSIUS carried thither from CONSTANTINE ſeemed calculated rather to compoſe and reconcile, than to animate and condemn. This was certainly the aim of EUSEBIUS of Nicomedia in whom CONSTANTINE had much confidence, that of the emperor himſelf, and not improbably that of OSIUS too. This council had not been unanimous in their ſubſcriptions, and nothing had been formally decided againſt ARIUS in it. But yet I think that the terms, which made ſo much noiſe in the nicaean council afterwards, were employed in this; the terms I mean of one nature or ſubſtance, and three perſons or ſubſiſtencies; for it was grown to be a point of honor among moſt of the prelates and great men of the church, not to ſuffer that the founder of their religion ſhould paſs for any thing leſs than a God, even the Supreme God. This circumſtance might

might encourage ALEXANDER, the biſhop of Alexandria, or rather his prompter ATHANASIUS; and ARIUS might think it a victory not to be ſoon defeated. He might think, that if his doctrine could ſtand the firſt brunt of oppoſition, it had as fair a chance of becoming orthodox as the other. Thus the diſpute continued, and the diſorders occaſioned by it at Alexandria, where it was carried on with open violence. It ſpread; it gained the court. The influence of the clergy on private conſcience, and the influence of private conſcience on public tranquillity, began to ſhew themſelves in a dangerous manner. CONSTANTINE ſaw, and apprehended the conſequences. To prevent them, he reſolved to call together a general council, and to preſide in it; for ſo in effect he did. He flattered himſelf, that an eccleſiaſtical diſpute would be beſt determined in an eccleſiaſtical aſſembly; and that a parcel of wrangling prieſts would be ſilenced by a ſynod repreſentative of their whole order. He reſolved to ſupport their decrees, whatever they ſhould be; about which it is plain enough, both by the language and the conduct he held, that he was much leſs ſolicitous, than he was to have any deciſion that might put an end to the diſpute: for which purpoſe there is room to ſuſpect, that he took, among others, one method, rather political than fair. I ſay, that there is room to ſuſpect this. I dare ſay no more in oppoſition to that profuſion of learning, which has been employed to defend the firſt nicaean council, and to prove the doctrine of the trinity that was ſettled in it to be an oecumenical deciſion. Mr. SELDEN publiſhed in latin, from an arabian manuſcript, the antiquities of the church of Alexandria, written by EUTYCHIUS a famous patriarch of that church, in the ninth or tenth century. Now this author having given a liſt of theſe patriarchs, from HANARIAS a cobler, who was the firſt of them, down to ALEXANDER, who was the eighteenth, relates, that CONSTANTINE ſummoned a council at Nicaea to determine the

diſpute between this patriarch and ARIUS. The council conſiſted, he ſays, of two thouſand and forty eight, whereof three hundred and eighteen were unanimous in declaring the divinity of CHRIST. The reſt were divided by a great number of different opinions, " ſententiarum diſcrimine multiplici;" they could not agree among themſelves, but they all oppoſed the three hundred and eighteen. SELDEN produces two authorities more, to confirm that of EUTYCHIUS: the authority of JOSEPH, an egyptian preſbyter, in his preface to a verſion of the councils into arabic, from antient chriſtian monuments; and that of ISMAEL IBN ALI, a mahometan hiſtorian of reputation. They ſpeak to the ſame effect: and by the concurrent teſtimony of all three the orthodox doctrine of the trinity was not that of the whole council, nor of a majority of the fathers. It ſeems to have been rather a profeſſion of faith drawn up by the biſhop of Jeruſalem for the emperor, " quam deſcripſerat ei " epiſc. Hieroſolymit." the emperor had it read in the ſynod: three hundred and eighteen approved it out of the whole number: theſe were unanimous, the reſt could agree in nothing, " nec inter ſe concordes, nec in fide ſuâ." It was neceſſary to the deſign of CONSTANTINE, therefore, that the deciſion of a party in the council ſhould paſs for an oecumenical deciſion. On the whole, there is room for the ſuſpicion I have mentioned; for if it ſhould be objected, that theſe teſtimonies were given ſome centuries after the events happened, the ſame objection may be made to the moſt approved of greek and roman, jewiſh and chriſtian, eccleſiaſtical and civil, ſacred and profane antiquities, as Mr. SELDEN obſerves. EUTYCHIUS and JOSEPH were learned antiquaries, they were both orthodox. They wanted no materials, and their biaſs was ſtrongly in favor of the nicaean council. EUTYCHIUS declares his approbation of the doctrine, and JOSEPH compares the three hundred and eighteen to the angels for their excellency, and to the ſtars for their

their ſplendor. The prejudices of theſe men were in favor of the doctrine and council, to both of which the mahometan hiſtorian muſt have been very indifferent: and, in this particular reſpect, his teſtimony may be deemed more credible than that either of ATHANASIUS, or of ARIUS, would be *.

IF CONSTANTINE flattered himſelf that this expedient would impoſe an uniform belief, the event ſhewed that he was much deceived. Such diſputes are in their nature not determinable: and all attempts to determine them by dogmatical deciſions are palliative remedies, of as bad conſequence as no deciſion at all, and of worſe when a ſubmiſſion to them is exacted by fraud, or force and violence. He was not yet acquainted with the pertinacious ſpirit of the clergy, who never give up a point which ambition or intereſt, enthuſiaſm or humor has made any of them advance; tho the peace of mankind and the lives of millions be at ſtake, in a quarrel that concerns neither natural religion nor even the eſſentials of revealed religion. Experience ſoon informed him better; for tho arianiſm was condemned, and the reverend fathers racked their brains to find out words that might eſtabliſh not a ſimilitude of the ſon to the father, but a ſameneſs and conſubſtantiality with him, nay tho the chiefs of the ſect ſeemed to ſubmit to the authority of the council, like the biſhops of Nicomedia and Caeſarea, yet the arians were arians ſtill. They ſeemed to ſubmit to it; but in truth they ſubmitted to that of the emperor, who would have a deciſion at any rate. The council made no converts. He made

* N. B. Since I have mentioned mahometan teſtimonies concerning the eſtabliſhment of the trinitarian doctrine, may I not be allowed to obſerve, that this doctrine gives the mahometans as much reaſon to ſay that the revelation which MAHOMET publiſhed was neceſſary to eſtabliſh the unity of the Supreme Being, in oppoſition to the polytheiſm which chriſtianity had introduced, as Chriſtians have to inſiſt that the revelation which CHRIST publiſhed a few centuries before, was neceſſary to eſtabliſh the unity of the Godhead againſt pagan polytheiſm?

ſome

ſome hypocrites, who anſwered his purpoſe enough, by playing with words ſo dexterouſly as to adopt athanaſian terms and retain arian opinions.

How ſhould the authority of this council have any weight with thoſe who thought like ARIUS, when it had none with thoſe who thought like ATHANASIUS? And it had none even with the very beſt of theſe. Notwithſtanding the zeal of St. GREGORY of Nazianze for the nicaean doctrine, it is evident that it had none with him. He maintained his opinions as independently of this council, to which they were conformable, as ARIUS could maintain his, that ſtood in direct oppoſition to it. How elſe can we account for what he ſays in a letter to PROCOPIUS? "I am determined, ſays the ſaint ſpeaking of councils, "to avoid all ſuch aſſemblies for the future." He declares that he "had not ſeen any council whoſe concluſion had been "happy, nor who had done more to cure than to increaſe and "aggravate evils." He ſpeaks in other places to the ſame effect. But what he ſays in his book about biſhops, to whoſe characters he was much leſs favorable, tho he was a biſhop, than St. JEROM was to their order, and what he ſays in ſome of his orations or ſermons, particularly in his farewell ſermon, when he quitted his biſhopric and retired to his ſolitude, go to the bottom of this matter, and ſhew how impoſſible it was that a council could be aſſembled in this famous fourth century, when ſo many important articles of faith were ſettled, that deſerved any more regard than that of Trent. Men were raiſed to the epiſcopal dignity too eaſily, he ſays, without regard to their morals, and without any other merit than a great deſire to be biſhops. The ignorance of theſe, however, was the leaſt evil; for there were others who became the "ludibria" may-games of life, indifferent about the faith, and ready to take any ſide, followers of the modes and cuſtoms of the times, not of the laws

laws of God. Lions to their inferiors, but fawning dogs to the great. He continues. When they have nothing elſe to boaſt, they boaſt of their very iniquity. This is that myſtery of iniquity, which has overſpread almoſt the whole world. He deſcribes ſome of theſe paſtors of the church indulging themſelves in all the effeminate luxury of the age, and patrons of their own vices in the vices of others, giving others leave to ſin that they might ſin with greater licence themſelves. He paints, in a ſort of contraſt with theſe, ſome who put off their braſs for gold, who wore long beards, ſolemn countenances, and modeſt habits; whoſe heads were reclined, their walk and geſture as compoſed, as their mien and their voice ſoft and gentle, " vocem pertenuem." They affected wiſdom in all their outward air, but they had none in their minds, where it ſhould principally reſide. He compares the noiſe and confuſion of their aſſemblies to thoſe of the circus and the theater. He complains that they were iniquitous and abſurd judges of things; " iniqui et abſurdi rerum judices." That names directed their hatred and their friendſhip; and that they did not bluſh to contradict themſelves before the ſame auditory. In ſhort, he congratulates himſelf that he ſhould ſit no longer among thoſe cranes and geeſe. He leaves them to their thrones and tyranny. He bids them be inſolent by themſelves. He bids them adieu. " Valete, pergite. Ego " me ad Deum convertam," ſays the ſaint.

I MIGHT collect many more anecdotes like theſe from the writings of St. GREGORY, and might ſtrengthen them too by other very orthodox authorities both before and after his time: by that of St. CYPRIAN, for inſtance, who wrote about a century before, as high an opinion as he entertained and propagated of biſhops and of the whole eccleſiaſtical order; and by that of SULPITIUS SEVERUS, who wrote about a century after his time.

time. I will quote the laſt particularly, becauſe it occurs to my memory as I am writing, and is very ſhort. SULPITIUS SEVERUS, a zealous Chriſtian of the fifth century, ſays, that in his time the beſt of the clergy *, thoſe who did not addict

* THO I have not quoted St. CYPRIAN as particularly as I have quoted St. GREGORY of Nazianze, in the text, it may be proper to do ſo in this note, that you may ſee the character of the Chriſtians, and even of the martyrs or confeſſors of the third century, as fully as you have ſeen that of the biſhops and councils of the fourth century. St. CYPRIAN then ſpeaks to this purpoſe in his book "de lapſis:" that the Chriſtians of his age were given up to inſatiable avarice; that the clergy were unſound in the faith, and licentious in their manners; that the men were effeminate, and diſgraced their beards; that the women were coquet and lewd: for he accuſes them here of proſtituting their members [a], that is, the members of CHRIST to the Gentiles; and, ſomewhere elſe, of lying with the chriſtian prieſts. He ſays, that not only raſh ſwearing, but perjury, inſolent contempt of their ſuperiors, poiſonous malice, and obſtinate hatred prevailed among the generality of Chriſtians. He ſays, in particular, that many biſhops, deſpiſing their holy function, were taken up with ſecular affairs; that they deſerted their flocks, wandered into the provinces of others, traded, exerciſed uſury, got fraudulently into the poſſeſſion of eſtates to which they had no right, grew rich, and left the poor to ſtarve. Such was the purity of an age famous for martyrs and confeſſors, and at the ſame time, for the greateſt diſſolution of manners. Nay, even confeſſors themſelves fell into the ſame diſſolution, and were guilty of the moſt abominable crimes, "fraudes, ſtupra, et "adulteria," as the ſaint aſſures us in his famous and favorite book, "de unitate "eccleſiae." He adds, that injuſtice, inſolence, and perfidy might be learned of theſe confeſſors, and he cautions Chriſtians againſt following their examples, "ne- "mo —— de confeſſoris moribus diſcat." Such was the clerical order; ſuch were thoſe martyrs or confeſſors, who obtained by their ſufferings the greateſt fame and authority in the church, at a time when many articles of faith were determined, and many more were on the point of being determined in the next century. As little credit as CYPRIAN may deſerve in other caſes, he deſerves much in this; for he advances nothing improbable, nothing which muſt not have been of public notoriety when he wrote. It may ſeem ſtrange, indeed, that ſo great a ſtickler as he was, for epiſcopal dignity and authority, and for the pre-eminence of the religious over the civil ſociety, ſhould tranſmit ſuch a character of them to poſterity. But this may be accounted for, perhaps, by aſſuming, for I grow very apt to aſſume, by converſing ſo much with eccleſiaſtical writers, who aſſume much oftener than they prove, that the ſaint applied to every biſhop eſpecially, and even to every prieſt, what modern divines applied to the pope, when they maintained, in the caſe of JULIUS the ſecond, at the beginning of the ſixteenth century, that no vices whatever could degrade this dignity, nor leſſen this authority, unleſs there was a ſuſpicion of hereſy [b].

[a] Proſtituêre gentilibus membra CHRISTI —— cum viris, iiſque clericis concumbentium.
[b] Vid. GUICCIARDIN, at the end of his ninth book.

them-

themſelves to trade and uſury, nor live in fine houſes, nor attend to the improvement of their great eſtates, did ſomething worſe; that they waited for preſents which were made to them, and diſgraced the dignity of their miniſtry by a venal ſanctity, and by the price they ſet on the exerciſe of it. Theſe complaints were not arrows ſhot in the dark. All of them were publiſhed at the time. Some of the keeneſt were ſo in a ſermon preached, before the whole court and people of Conſtantinople, in the church of Sancta Sophia. They are more than ſufficient, therefore, to take away all that reſpect for councils, even for the nicaean, which has been founded ſo high by divines in all ages from the fourth downwards. They may ſerve likewiſe to take off our wonder at all the revolutions to which the orthodox doctrine of the trinity was expoſed in an age when councils contradicted councils; when four or five hundred fathers of the church, for I think there were ſo many at Rimini, to ſay nothing of the council of Seleucia and others, could prevaricate about a doctrine ſo lately eſtabliſhed, and when arianiſm could revive in this ſhort ſpace of time ſo much as to make one orthodox doctor * complain that, except a few, who were of his party you may be ſure, all the reſt of the ten provinces of Aſia had not the true knowledge of God; and another †, that the world was ſurpriſed to find itſelf arian. "Miratus eſt orbis ſe eſſe aria-"num:" in ſhort, when not only a great number of the "gens "linigera," the ſurplice-wearing crowd, but LIBERIUS the biſhop of Rome, and that great column of orthodoxy, OSIUS, became fautors of the arians.

THE truth is, that whether laymen came into theſe ſynods or not, as St. GREGORY of Nazianzen complains bitterly that they did, the ſpirit of the court was the ſpirit that directed the determinations of councils. A ſucceſſion of princes like VA-

* St. HILARY. † St. JEROM.

LENS would have made the whole roman empire arian. A ſucceſſion of princes like JULIAN might have made it pagan again. But a ſucceſſion of princes like THEODOSIUS, like him, at leaſt, in his religious character, baniſhed arianiſm to the Goths, among whom it was at laſt extinguiſhed by RECAREDUS in Spain, tho not by means as gentle as MARIANA would inſinuate. If chriſtianity was not propagated, as the religion of MAHOMET was, yet is it true to ſay that the ſyſtem of chriſtian theology, which has paſſed for the chriſtian religion ever ſince, and has done ſo much hurt under that notion, was eſtabliſhed by the ſword, and by every kind of perſecution.

THE orthodox opinion concerning the divinity of JESUS had two advantages over the other, which could not, as I think they did not, fail to produce great effects on all thoſe who were zealouſly affected to chriſtianity, or who deſired, for any reaſon religious or political, to maintain the fervor of others. The firſt of theſe advantages was this. The orthodox belief gave a greater luſtre to chriſtianity. If the other came more nearly to the truth, and contradicted human reaſon leſs, yet this held out more of the marvellous: and the marvellous in matters of religion, that is preſumed to be revealed, will impoſe and affect more than truth and reaſon. This was an advantage which the ableſt of the fathers ſaw and improved: and therefore ſome of them always maintained it with a zeal, which would have been called heretical obſtinacy, if they had not happened to be declared orthodox at laſt, againſt thoſe who were willing to ſoften certain terms for the ſake of peace and union; and they preferred to both theſe the keeping it intire. They ſucceeded. They took every other advantage that the courſe of events offered, or intrigue could procure; they improved them all by this, and they tranſmitted to poſterity the orthodox doctrine after many ſtruggles.

EVERY

EVERY able man ſaw and improved this advantage; but the other was of a nature to make itſelf felt by every man who embraced chriſtianity, for it proceeded from the pride of the human heart. That the Supreme Being ſhould ſend an inferior being, who was for that reaſon called his ſon, to redeem mankind, and to give them a more perfect law, might be thought ſufficient to ſatisfy divine juſtice, that required, according to them, a victim to be offered up, and even an honor more than ſufficient done to creatures whom he had placed in the loweſt rank of intelligent beings and moral agents. But that he ſhould ſend his ſon, who was conſubſtantial with himſelf, in glory equal, in majeſty coeternal, to fulfill ſuch purpoſes as theſe, might be thought ſuch a mark of favor and predilection as raiſed the ſons of men to a much higher rank in the ſcale of being. Agreeably to this notion, we find that the angel in the apocalypſe would not ſuffer St. JOHN to adore him, but declared himſelf a fellow-ſervant to the evangeliſt, and to all thoſe who had the teſtimony of JESUS *. This reſpect was not ſhewn even to ABRAHAM, nor DANIEL, before the incarnation of CHRIST and the redemption of man, which is a myſtery that the angels acknowledge and reverence †. They acknowledge it, and by that they acknowledge the dignity of the human nature. Thus far ERASMUS § carries the obſervation. But a right reverend archbiſhop ‖ of our church carries it much farther, at the cloſe of one of his ſermons, where he obſerves very pathetically, that when the angels fell, God left them in their fallen ſtate; but when man fell, he ſent his ſon, his only begotten, his dearly beloved ſon, to redeem the race by his ſufferings and

* Vide ne feceris, conſervus tuus ſum, et fratrum tuorum habentium teſtimonium JESU. Apoc. c. xix.

† ——In quem deſiderant angeli proſpicere. St. PETER, 1 ep. c. i.

§ Cateches. 6. ‖ TILLOTSON.

paſſion. One of theſe divines raiſes us to an equality with the angels, the other to a ſuperiority over them.

THERE are a multitude of other inſtances, ready to be brought, wherein fathers of the church and councils have impoſed their own imaginations, and, perhaps, their miſtakes, for revealed doctrines and divine truths, curſing and perſecuting all thoſe who diſſented from them. Theſe inſtances do not fall within the bounds I have ſet to myſelf. One of them, however, ſhall be juſt mentioned, becauſe it has been the ſubject of much controverſy, and the cauſe of much diſorder in many countries, and is ſo at this time in France. Our countryman PELAGIUS appeared in the beginning of the fifth century. He was called the britannic ſerpent. His firſt antagoniſt was the ſurly, foul-mouthed controverſiſt JEROM: his greateſt was AUSTIN. He was condemned by councils, and excommunicated by popes. But he was a great genius, a great divine, and a great philoſopher; and if he was too much a ſtoician in his theology, he might have reproached thoſe who oppoſed him, St. AUSTIN particularly, for mingling too much platoniſm in theirs. The principal objection to his doctrine was, that he aſcribed too much to freewill, and nothing to grace. But it may be, that if he magnified too highly the ſufficiency of one, he extenuated, rather than rejected, the uſe and efficacy of the other. The ſemi-pelagians at leaſt, who diſſented from the african biſhop about predeſtination and grace, avoided the extreme into which PELAGIUS was underſtood to go, and maintained a neceſſary concurrence of freewill and grace; by which they avoided the abſurd circular reaſoning of thoſe who make faith neceſſary to obtain grace, and grace neceſſary to produce faith. Man was to co-operate with God in their theology, and ſalvation was open to all who did ſo. This doctrine appears moderate, reaſonable, and no way repugnant to the ideas of divine juſtice and goodneſs;

goodneſs; whereas that of an abſolute predeſtination, of election and reprobation, is ſcandalouſly ſo. A Jew accuſtomed to believe that God had choſen one nation to be his peculiarly, and excluſively of all others, might fall eaſily into an opinion, that a divine partiality for particular men had ſucceeded and taken the place of a divine partiality for a particular nation. But it has been, and it muſt be always, very impolitic in divines to fix ſuch blaſphemy on the great maſter of their artificial theology, if St. PAUL may be underſtood naturally and coherently in another ſenſe. The apoſtle meaned, as LOCKE † explains his meaning not very naturally perhaps, nor coherently, to aſſert the right which God has over all the nations of the earth, to raiſe and to favor one, to depreſs and reject another, according to his good pleaſure and the impenetrable ſecrets of his providence. The Jews were rejected nationally, becauſe they refuſed nationally to receive the Meſſiah. But thoſe of them who received him were not included in this rejection. He had choſen them nationally, by virtue of his ſovereignty. By virtue of the ſame, he had rejected them nationally likewiſe: but of perſonal election or rejection among thoſe who embraced chriſtianity, and ſo became the people of God inſtead of the Jews, the apoſtle had no intention to ſpeak; if this expoſitor gueſſes well. Thus indeed we muſt underſtand St. PAUL, to reconcile his doctrine a little to common ſenſe *, to common equity,

† Vid. LOCKE in his paraph. and notes. 7.

* I SAY a little; becauſe it may be obſerved, that when Mr. LOCKE aſſerts, on this occaſion, that God proceeds to favor or reject nations arbitrarily, and by the right of his ſovereignty alone, without any regard to their moral character, he proſtitutes ſtill, in ſome degree, that of God himſelf, and ſacrifices a great deal too much to his reſpect for St. PAUL. In order to ſoften the abſurdity of the apoſtle, who meaned, as it appears plainly enough by the context, notwithſtanding this ingenious device, juſt what CALVIN ſuppoſed him to mean, he deſtroys the great ſanction of natural law, by which the virtues of ſocieties tend neceſſarily to their proſperity, and the vices to their miſery. Surely this doctrine of abſolute predeſtination,

equity, and to ſuch notions of the divine perfections as it would be much more impious to diſbelieve, than to diſbelieve him. But St. AUSTIN thought fit to underſtand him otherwiſe, and to believe the apoſtle according to his own interpretation of ſome paſſages, in defiance of common ſenſe, common equity, and true theiſm. St. AUSTIN, whom other fathers and councils have followed, St. LUTHER, St. CALVIN, and St. JANSENIUS, have ſuppoſed a myſtery where there is none, except in the ſtyle of a writer the leaſt preciſe and clear that ever writ: and under pretence of explaining this myſtery they have blaſphemed, as St. PAUL himſelf did, if his ſenſe was theirs. They have made a god, ſuch as no one, who knows what he ſays when he ſays he believes a god, can acknowledge: and they impute to him, what they who believe a devil might impute with great propriety to that wicked ſpirit. This ſtrange and impious doctrine has been tranſmitted to us from the fifth century, and tho diſputed by ſome, is held in general to be orthodox. They who agree in little elſe, agree in this. Janſeniſts, lutherans, calviniſts, and I am ſorry to ſay that the divines of our church, who are better theiſts than to adopt ſo abominable a doctrine, are obliged to ſwear that they do, when they ſubſcribe the thirty nine articles. Whether St. PAUL intended to teach it is made to ſome perſons, but I confeſs not to my ſelf, doubtful: that St. AUSTIN did, and that CHRIST did not, teach it, is certain; and yet this doctrine is one of thoſe which theology has impoſed for a chriſtian doctrine, and by which the peace of the world has been diſturbed in every age of the church. The truth is, that the church has been in every

nation, and that of unlimited paſſive obedience, are doctrines of the utmoſt abſurdity, tho taught by this apoſtle; with this difference however, that one teaches us to ſubmit to the arbitrary will of man, and the other, that God proceeds in his government, as human tyrants do, by arbitrary will. One is abſurd: the other both abſurd and impious.

age

age an hydra, ſuch a monſter as the poets feign with many heads. All theſe heads hiſſed and barked and tore one another with fury. As faſt as ſome were cut off, others ſprouted out, and all the art and all the violence employed to create an apparent, could never create a real uniformity. The ſcene of chriſtianity has been always a ſcene of diſſention, of hatred, of perſecution, and of blood.

SECTION XXXI.

This the atheiſts object, and Chriſtians cannot deny. It is neceſſary, therefore, in order to juſtify the chriſtian religion from this reproach, that we proceed to ſhew, by inſtances ſtill ſtronger and more modern than thoſe that have been already produced, how theſe diſturbances, far from being the natural effects of religion, have proceeded ſolely from the conſtitution of the chriſtian church, by which the peace of the world was laid, in the firſt ages of chriſtianity, and ſtill lies at the mercy of an order of men, who indulge their paſſions, and find their account ſeveral ways in diſturbing it. We have proved, by undeniable evidence, that the whole body of the clergy, ſome few good and learned but not infallible men excepted, was ignorant, contentious, and profligate; and that councils were riotous aſſemblies, governed by intrigue, and celebrated with noiſe, confuſion, and the greateſt indecency. This was the ſtate of the church in the fourth century: and it did not grow better, if it could not grow worſe, afterwards. On the contrary, as learning and knowledge decreaſed in the latter empire, the impoſitions of eccleſiaſtical authority grew up to ſuch an height, and were ſo confirmed in the courſe of nine centuries at leaſt, that when learning revived, tho they were detected, they could not be exploded. A chriſtian church, for I uſe the word

word here in the improper but common acceptation of it, having been eſtabliſhed in the empire by CONSTANTINE, as well as the chriſtian religion, and both of them being ſuppoſed to have the ſame divine original, the power and diſcipline of one became as independent of the civil authority, as the doctrines of the other. According to this ſyſtem, the clergy did not compoſe, in the empire nor out of it, wherever they were admitted, an order belonging to the ſtate that admitted them; nor incorporated with it, as a member of the ſame body, independent on it as a ſubject. But they compoſed, more properly, an order diſtinct from it, the member of another body, the ſubject of another ſtate. Churchmen were buſy and troubleſome inmates, in every family where they were received. They lived at the expence of it, they acquired government in it, and they had often an intereſt contrary to it. This was the caſe whilſt the empire continued intire. The authority of the empire extended itſelf over many provinces and different ſtates. So did that of the church. Even the conquerors of one were conquered by the other. Thus it happened in the Weſt, if not in the Eaſt, and the Goths chriſtianiſed, if the Saracens did not. When the empire was broken to pieces, the church remained intire, and the ſame eccleſiaſtical authority and diſcipline ſubſiſted, where the ſame imperial authority and government were no longer acknowledged.

BUT it is neceſſary I ſhould ſhew you, in ſome particulars, the truth of what is advanced, in general. —— Whilſt the Chriſtians were a ſect in the empire, they had private judicatures of their own, and they avoided the pagan tribunals, not only becauſe they might think that it was below the dignity of ſaints to ſubmit to be tried by them, but chiefly becauſe it was prudent to conceal from unbelievers that Chriſtians went to law with Chriſtians, and that notwithſtanding the ſanctity of their

their profeſſion, the greateſt crimes, even that of inceſt, were practiſed among them. That theſe were their reaſons, is plain from what St. PAUL writes to the Corinthians in the fifth and ſixth chapters of his firſt epiſtle. Tho abſent in body, yet preſent with them in ſpirit, he judges the inceſtuous man, and delivers him over to Satan. Neither he, nor they, had any right to judge thoſe who were out of the church. But they had a right to judge thoſe who were in it, or they pretended to have it. Inceſt might have been puniſhed by a pagan judge. But the inceſt of a Chriſtian was to be puniſhed by Chriſtians, as far as they could puniſh by excommunicating and delivering over to the devil, but even thus in order to the ſalvation of the criminal; that the ſpirit may be ſaved in the day of our Lord JESUS, tho the fleſh be deſtroyed. St. PAUL aſks, "dare any of you, "having a matter againſt another, go to law before the unjuſt, "that is, the Heathens, and not before the ſaints, that is, "your fellow Chriſtians? Do you not know that the ſaints "ſhall judge the world? Know you not that we ſhall judge "angels?" After which, the apoſtle directs ſuch as have any controverſy together to take the meaneſt or moſt contemptible Chriſtian for their judge, rather than to go to the tribunals of the impious. I underſtand the paſſage, as ERASMUS explains it, more agreeably to the drift of this whole argumentation than others. St. AUSTIN, he ſays, gave it the ſame ſenſe; but I wonder this judicious critic did not obſerve how abſurdly the ſaint reaſoned, when he thought he was obliged, by this paſſage, to take upon himſelf the judgment of cauſes, becauſe he was a biſhop *. The reaſoning of St. PAUL, however excellent in his time, could not be applicable in that of St. AUSTIN. The empire was then become Chriſtian. The ſaints were judged by ſaints, in the public tribunals; and the apprehenſion of

* Divus AUGUSTINUS, in libro de opere monachorum, ait ſeſe ex hoc PAULI loco cogi ad ſuſcipienda judicia cauſarum, quum eſſet epiſcopus.

giving ſcandal to the heathen was a vain pretence, on many accounts.

THE truth is, that there was in thoſe days, what has been ſeen very often ſince among the clergy, a ſort of holy ambition, which proved as ſtrong a motive in the hearts of good men tranſported by a miſtaken zeal for the church, whoſe cauſe they confounded with the cauſe of religion, as that profane ambition, which meaned nothing more than to advance, under pious pretences, the grandeur, wealth, and dominion of the religious over the civil ſociety, was in the hearts of hypocrites and knaves. Innumerable ſuch examples charity will incline us to believe that there have been, and without going farther than our own country and the laſt age, ſuch LAUD ſeems to me to have been, an ambitious, tyrannical prieſt, but a pious man.

THESE two ſorts of ambition helped one another mutually. Neither of them could have done ſo well alone; but both concurring, from very different motives, they ſoon eſtabliſhed a church as independent on the ſtate, as conjunctures well improved, and the characters of princes well managed, could make it. The emperors were moſtly favorable to them, for one of theſe two reaſons, and ſometimes for both. As far as bigottry prevailed, they looked on the conſtitution of the church to be of the ſame divine original as the doctrines of it. They received the former on the faith of thoſe from whom they received the latter. They had as good authority for one as for the other; and however the clergy might differ about points of doctrine, and ſome of diſcipline, the whole order agreed to inculcate the ſame reſpect for the hierarchy, or the holy principality, that is, for their own order. CHRIST had eſtabliſhed his church on the model of the jewiſh. The near correſpondence of eccleſiaſti-

cal

cal polity, under both diſpenſations, ſhewed a ſameneſs of original; and the near correſpondence of the terreſtrial hierarchy, with that which had been imagined in heaven, proved that it was divine. All this was ſhewiſh. It paſſes now. It might well paſs then. But yet, I think, there was another reaſon for favoring the church, which the emperors felt more ſenſibly.

THE notion of a formal alliance between the church and the ſtate, as between two independent diſtinct powers, is a very groundleſs and whimſical notion *. But a fraudulent or ſilent compact

* I HAVE heard of a ſermon preached by one doctor SENIOR, a fellow of Trinity college in Cambridge before king CHARLES the ſecond at Newmarket, in the days of paſſive obedience and non-reſiſtance, and afterwards printed. His text was taken from the 14, 15, and 16th verſes of the 4th chapter of Exodus, or ſome of them, wherein God directs MOSES to take AARON, the levite, becauſe he knew that AARON could ſpeak well to the people, and joins them together in commiſſion, that they might aſſiſt one another mutually; that AARON might be inſtead of a mouth to MOSES, and that MOSES might be inſtead of God to AARON. What other applications the good doctor made of theſe texts I know not. But I am informed by one [a], who has read the ſermon, that he eſtabliſhed on them a ſuppoſed alliance between the church and the ſtate: or rather between the church and the king. By this alliance, the well-ſpoken levite was to inſtil paſſive obedience to the king into the minds of the people, and to inſiſt on it, as on a law of God. The king, on the other hand, was to be the nurſing father of the church, to ſupport her authority, to preſerve at leaſt, if not increaſe, her immunities, and to keep her in the full poſſeſſion of all the advantages ſhe claimed. The church performed her part, and had a right, by virtue of this alliance, if the king did not perform his, to teach this doctrine no longer, and to reſume her independency on the ſtate and on him. This was the purport of the ſermon at leaſt: and WARBURTON took his hint, poſſibly, from it, and turned it to ſerve his purpoſe, that is, to lay down the ſame principles, and to banter mankind, if he could, by not drawing directly and avowedly from them the ſame concluſions. Doctor SENIOR's authority is, no doubt, as good in this caſe, as that of DEMARCA, or even of BOSSUET. The firſt, a time-ſerving [b] prieſt, intereſted, and a great flatterer, if ever there was one, and who made no ſcruple to explain away whatever he had found himſelf obliged to ſay in favor of the ſtate. The latter

[a] Mr. LEWIS, who was himſelf of Trinity college.

[b] When DEMARCA was made biſhop of Conſerans, and could not get his bulls diſpatched, he explained away all he ſaid to limit the papal power. He ſent this book to INNOCENT the Xth, with a letter, whereby he retracted many things he had ſaid, aſked pardon for his errors, and promiſed for the future to ſupport, with all his force, the prerogatives of the church of Rome. After this he writ "de ſingulari primatu PETRI," to flatter the ſame pope.

compact between princes and prieſts became very real, as ſoon as an eccleſiaſtical order was eſtabliſhed. The emperors admitted and reverenced, or appeared to reverence the divine right of the clergy. The clergy, in return, made uſe of their influence over conſciences to eſtabliſh an opinion of a divine right in them. They were no longer deified after death, as they had been whilſt the empire was pagan; but they were made ſacred during their lives: and as biſhops ordained one another and their ſubordinate prieſts, by the impoſition of hands, ſo they ordained emperors and kings by crowning them and by anointing them with holy oil, which angels were ſometimes employed to bring down from heaven. As they made their own office, ſo they made that of emperors and kings, independent of human inſtitution, and the divine appointment was ſignified, or rather conveyed, in both caſes by their miniſtry. By this alliance of the hierarchy and the monarchy, religion, that ſhould ſupport good government alone, was employed to ſupport good or bad government alike, as it had been by St. PAUL: and the worſt of men, and the greateſt uſurpers and tyrants, were not only paſſively obeyed, but ſerved and courted by the moſt eminent ſaints of the church, when no eccleſiaſtical intereſt prevailed to alter their conduct; for then the moſt fulſome panegyriſts became the moſt virulent libellers, and they, who had preached ſubmiſſion, preached rebellion.

SUCH infractions of this alliance, or compact, happened ſometimes; but in general it held: and a joint uſurpation on

was as wiſe, if not as cunning, as learned, and a much better man, tho not ſo much in the favor of Mr. WARBURTON, who gave them characters in his aſſuming ſtyle without knowing any thing of them, and who has the impertinence to pronounce of the greateſt ſcholar, the greateſt divine, and the greateſt orator of his age, that he was [a] a good ſenſible man. He was all I have ſaid of him: but he was an eccleſiaſtic, and a ſubject of France.

[a] Vid. the laſt edition of the alliance between church and ſtate demonſtrated.

the

the liberties of mankind was the effect of it. We have obſerved already, that CONSTANTINE meaned to govern the chriſtian flocks by their paſtors. Neither he, nor his ſucceſſors, perceived, that the imperial and kingly power might be controuled in time by the very expedient by which they hoped to govern more abſolutely. Neither he, nor they, apprehended ſoon enough, that if a degree of eccleſiaſtical power was neceſſary to maintain religion, religion might become an expedient to render this power exorbitant. The clergy employed it, to ſerve the ambition of princes. Why ſhould they not employ it, to ſerve more effectually their own? All this happened in time, and was brought about by ſlow but ſure degrees. The church claimed at firſt eccleſiaſtical juriſdiction, as it was called, alone; cognizance of ſins againſt the laws of God, rather than of crimes againſt the laws of civil ſocieties, and of matters purely ſpiritual that related to the conſciences of men, and that the civil power could not properly judge. But then among theſe objects of eccleſiaſtical juriſdiction, diſcipline and manners, two very vague appellations, and liable to be much extended, were contained. Sins were multiplied by variety of doctrines; and as they were puniſhed by diſcipline, they were multiplied too by that. Things that could not be deemed ſpiritual were hawled in as things appertaining to ſpirituals. Thus eccleſiaſtical juriſdiction was extended: and the emperors confirmed it, not only by referring ſuch matters to the judgment of ſynods and ſpiritual courts, but by their poſitive edicts.

THAT they were indifferent enough about doctrines, and more ſolicitous to eſtabliſh uniformity than orthodoxy, may be well ſuſpected of ſeveral. CONSTANTINE favored the nicaean doctrine, in hopes to eſtabliſh uniformity by it. But when he found that it received different interpretations, and that ATHANASIUS was a principal obſtacle to all terms of accommodation,

on, he ſhewed favor to the other. He perſecuted ATHANASIUS, he hearkened more than ever to EUSEBIUS of Nicomedia, and when he came to die, he died in that city, a little after he had been baptiſed by EUSEBIUS. Some of your writers, indeed, would perſuade, that he was baptiſed at Rome by SYLVESTER, in order to give ſome color to that impudent forgery of his donation to that pope and the roman church. But how ſhould they perſuade, by fabulous traditions, and ſuch anachroniſms as even Jews would bluſh to own, againſt the tenor of authentic hiſtory, and the monuments of the age; for ſuch we muſt repute the dates of his edicts to be in this caſe? I think that his ſucceſſors, who appear the moſt attached to reigning orthodox opinions, might act on the ſame principle. They diſcovered, and they might have diſcovered ſooner, that theſe theological diſputes are indeterminable in their nature. They imagined, and they might well imagine after what they had ſeen, tho the notion be not abſolutely true, that tranquility could not be preſerved in the ſtate without uniformity in religion. To procure this uniformity, therefore, councils provincial and general were called and held on every occaſion. They were called and held, the general councils at leaſt were ſo, by the imperial authority, and not by that of the patriarch of Rome, nor that of the patriarch of Conſtantinople, in the firſt ages after the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity. They were compoſed, no doubt, much like thoſe that have been above deſcribed, that is, very ſcandalouſly; and they would have decreed to little purpoſe, if their authority had ſtood alone. But that of the emperors bore them out. The emperors wanted only a pretence to force an uniform ſubmiſſion to ſome deciſion or other; and their authority was juſt ſufficient for that purpoſe in vulgar prejudice. Thus the allied powers, the hierarchy and the monarchy, have acted ever ſince. Theſe farces were renewed in every age: in every age their conſequences

quences were more or leſs tragical; and this is the authority to which the chriſtian world has been reſigned in matters of religion.

SECTION XXXII.

THE religious ſociety roſe very faſt, by ſuch means as theſe, to great pre-eminence over the civil, in the empire, and to an influence over private conſciences, that rendered their diſputes, ſometimes about trifling ceremonies, and ſometimes about unintelligible ſpeculations, a new ſource of diſſention among mankind, unknown to the pagan world, and even greater than any of thoſe that provoke the moſt barbarous nations to exceſſes of cruelty. But there were other means, which encreaſed this pre-eminence and influence vaſtly, and inabled the church to do ſtill greater miſchief to the ſtate. One of theſe means we may reckon to have been the improvement that was made in the hierarchical ſyſtem. Chriſtianity was a numerous ſect before CONSTANTINE, or CONSTANTINE would have been a Chriſtian no more than LICINIUS. But the ſame order and the ſame polity, which were eſtabliſhed afterwards, could not be eſtabliſhed either in particular churches, or in the church in general, whilſt it was a ſect. There was a ſort of mixed government, ariſtocratical and democratical, in the churches, and ſome of theſe might correſpond and convene together. But in the firſt caſe, there was not power ſufficient to inforce ſubordination, nor facility, nor ſafety enough in the ſecond, whilſt theſe churches were diſperſed far and wide under heathen governments. Preſbyters or elders ruled the churches. They were all biſhops, that is, overſeers, alike, and cocqual in rank and power, till factions ariſing, one preſbyter was appointed by the apoſtles, or choſen by the faithful, to govern the reſt, and was ſtyled the

the biſhop "eminentiae gratiâ." Pre-eminence and ſubordination were eſtabliſhed, for much the ſame reaſon, even among theſe ſuperior preſbyters or biſhops. When metropolitans or arch-biſhops began to be known in the church is not very certain. But I ſuppoſe it is certain, that the biſhop of a church eſtabliſhed in any metropolis preſided in every aſſembly over the other preſbyters of the province, even before the reign of CONSTANTINE. Thus you ſee, that the democratical form of church government, which obtained in the days of the apoſtles, when every one was a teacher that would be ſo, and when they themſelves had no other authority among the faithful than that of firſt preachers of the goſpel and firſt founders of churches, grew early to be ariſtocratical. You ſee, likewiſe, how early this form began to tend to the monarchical. It tended to it in every ſucceeding age more and more. As CONSTANTINE changed the religion, he made great changes in the conſtitution of the empire, in the military order, and in the civil adminiſtration. He created new and higher offices in the ſtate. So did the clergy in the church. He conſtituted vicars over the governors of provinces. So primates were raiſed above metropolitans. The praefecti praetorio had a rank above the vicars. So patriarchs had, whenever they got it, over primates. The eccleſiaſtical power roſe up from a rough and broad baſis to the form of a pyramid; and if the laſt ſtone was not laid to crown the fabric, it was attempted to be laid. In plain terms, if there had been an uninterrupted ſucceſſion of popes, like GREGORY the ſeventh, during a century, the Weſt might have ſeen as well as the Eaſt a whimſical but real empire founded on ſuperſtition. A reputed vicar of God, the pope, might have governed here as abſolutely, as a reputed divinity, the dairo, did there. But the fates of the dairo and the pope have been much alike. The former is depoſed, confined, and ſtill adored. The latter has been much degraded, if not depoſed.

His

His power is confined, if not his perſon; and tho his thunder be heard no longer, he maintains the pageantry of an eccleſiaſtical JUPITER.

IT may appear matter of wonder, that a body of men as ignorant and as profligate as that of the clergy ſhewed itſelf to be, as ſoon as it figured in the empire, ſhould be able to aſſume, under pretence of religion, a power equally exorbitant in the exerciſe, and miſchievous in the conſequences. But our wonder will ceaſe, if we conſider another of the means that were employed to bring this about. Superſtition took the place of religion, and faith of morality. To profeſs a belief of what no man underſtood, and to perform all the external duties which the church required, paſſed, in thoſe days, and I apprehend they do ſo ſtill among many, for the ſum of religion. The athanaſian creed had little intention to make better men, and better citizens. The eight or nine creeds of the arians had probably as little; and yet an aſſent to theſe creeds would have covered a multitude of ſins, better than charity: and the vileſt of men would have had a fairer chance for ſalvation, in either of theſe ſects, for the merit of believing, than the moſt virtuous of men, out of it, for the merit of acting all their lives as ſuch. A religion, which conſiſted in the profeſſion of an implicit belief, and in the practice of certain external duties, was much more grateful to the generality of men, than a ſpiritual religion that ſhewed itſelf outwardly by a ſtrict practice of all the duties of public and private morality. As ſoon, therefore, as theology and ſuperſtition had introduced ſuch a religion in the place of original chriſtianity, the one paſſed eaſily for the other; the inclinations of mankind helped the deception; the vices of the laity were indulged, the vices of the clergy were covered, by it. The ſolemn manner in which theſe men officiated impoſed on the vulgar of all ranks, who were ſeduced by the eye, and led

by the ear. The very habits of biſhops and prieſts contributed much to the ſame purpoſes, as St. GREGORY of Nazianzen obſerves in one of the diſcourſes to which I referred above. The venerable ephod, the caſſoc of SAMUEL, the humble walking ſtaff, and thoſe ornaments of the head that denoted virginity *.

BUT farther. Leſt all this ſhould not be ſufficient to keep up the falſe notions of religion, which could alone maintain a profligate clergy in the pre-eminence and authority they had uſurped, another expedient was employed. It was of ſuch a nature, that it might have been thought more proper to expoſe and aggravate, by the contraſt it created, than to conceal and attone for the general turpitude of the clergy. But the promoters of it knew what they did. They truſted to the abſurdity of mankind, and they followed, with confidence and ſucceſs, the example ſet them by the clergy of the moſt antient nations. The order of the magi, for inſtance, was not leſs ambitious, nor more virtuous probably, than they were: and the ſame might be preſumed of other eccleſiaſtical orders that had floriſhed in the Eaſt. But in all theſe orders, there had been particular men, and ſects of men, who retired from the world, and dedicated themſelves to lives of ſeeming ſanctity and real auſterity, by which they maintained a reverence for the groſſeſt ſuperſtitions, and for the much larger part of the ſame eccleſiaſtical body who remained in the world, and were not exempt from the corruptions of it. PYTHAGORAS had imitated theſe inſtitutions; and the Jews, who had borrowed much from the Greeks after ALEXANDER's expedition had brought them acquainted, ſeemed to have copied in the ſame inſtance after him. If the ſadducees might be ſaid to reſemble the epicureans, and the phariſees the ſtoicians, ſure I am that a nearer reſemblance might be

* Cernimus venerandam ephodum, et SAMUELIS diploidem, ſcipionem humilem, capitis ornamenta virginibus peculiaria, &c.

found

found between the eſſenes and the diſciples of PYTHAGORAS, who were behind the curtain, and who lived in community. The eſſenes confined themſelves to Paleſtine; but the therapeutae were a ſort of helleniſt eſſenes, who diſperſed themſelves, as the Chriſtians had done, into Greece and other countries, but principally into Egypt; for which reaſon one of the names was better known to JOSEPHUS, and the other to PHILO. Nothing can be more admirable than the ſanctity and auſterity of this ſect, whether appearing in the world or hid in their ſolitudes. EUSEBIUS, whom an improbability ſeldom ſtopped, would have made Chriſtians of them; as ſeveral antient and modern divines have endeavoured to do after him, but to no purpoſe. Chriſtianity was little ſpread, ſcarce known, and ſcarce diſtinguiſhed from judaiſm, when PHILO gave an account of this ſect. But this ſect had been long in fulneſs of fame, before it was imitated by Chriſtians; for it had been ſo even before chriſtianity.

THE decian and other perſecutions firſt, religious melancholy and even a deſire of fame afterwards, might carry many Chriſtians to lead an anchoretic life, as PAUL and ANTHONY did in the deſerts of Egypt, about whom ATHANASIUS and JEROM have publiſhed ſo many ſtupid lies. The cenobitic life began much about their time; for it was in the fourth century that BASIL inſtituted his order. But this inſtitution did not come into great vogue, till the want of it was more felt in the very beginning of the ſixth century. It was then that BENEDICT founded his order in Italy, from which ſo many others ſprouted up, like the ſuckers of a great tree. Monaſtic inſtitutions multiplied in every age, in the Weſt particularly; for they grew more and more neceſſary, in every age, to the church, as the eccleſiaſtical order in general gave more and more ſcandal, and as the uſurpations of the roman pontiffs, who made great ad-

vances towards a ſpiritual monarchy, increaſed. Enthuſiaſm, abetted and conducted by the policy of the church, was a principal motive to ſuch eſtabliſhments: and indeed no other motive could have filled theſe numerous ſocieties. The fervor in every one was great at firſt: and they renewed, in the opinion of mankind, that ſimplicity, that innocence, that zeal, and that devout auſterity, by which primitive Chriſtians were ſuppoſed to have diſtinguiſhed themſelves. But this fervor ſoon grew cool, and luxury, and vices of all kinds, as prevalent in theſe religious ſocieties, as in any other parts of the chriſtian church. The expedient however, that ſerved to maintain eccleſiaſtical pre-eminence and authority, did not fail for this. The ſecular clergy had been provided for amply, that they might have the means and incouragements neceſſary to make them anſwer the ends of their inſtitution, and that no excuſe might be left them for neglecting theſe ends. But when they turned into ſcandal what was deſigned for edification, and forfeited, therefore, their right to all they injoyed by the beneficence of the faithful; when they ſhould have been reformed, or their revenues ſhould have been given to others, inſtead of this they kept their poſſeſſions tho they broke their conventions with the public, and the public was at the expence of enriching another clergy. Juſt ſo again, and as faſt as this other clergy grew corrupt, nothing was taken from them; but new orders of the ſame kind were founded to ſcreen them and the ſecular clergy both, or to attone for the iniquity of both: and that eternal bubble, the laity, paid the whole immenſe and growing charge.

Thus have things continued to the preſent age: and the religious ſociety, among Chriſtians, has imitated ſucceſsfully the policy of religious ſocieties that floriſhed, above three thouſand years ago, in the pagan world. You muſt not be ſurpriſ-

ed

ed at this aſſertion. It is eaſy to ſhew, that the vaſt variety of religions, which prevail in the world, are derived ultimately from a few general principles, common to all men, becauſe they ariſe from the common fund of human nature: and that in conſequence of this, many rites and ceremonies, many inſtitutions and orders, muſt deſcend, ſometimes with more and ſometimes with leſs affinity, to the lateſt poſterity. They deſcend, like torrents of water, which are not the ſame to the ſight nor taſte, when the length of their courſe, the ſoils thro which they have paſſed, and the mixture of other ſtreams, have purified ſome, and rendered others more foul. But they deſcend from the ſame ſprings: and like thoſe mighty rivers which preſerve the freſhneſs of their waters very far into the ſea, they preſerve much of their original character, as they roll along through the vaſt ocean of time. Turn your eyes even at this day to the Eaſt. You will diſcover rites, ceremonies, inſtitutions, and orders of men, wherever the devaſtations of barbarous nations have not deſtroyed the people as well as the religions of countries, much like to thoſe which prevailed in the ſame countries in the remoteſt antiquity. The bramins have a ſort of allegorical polytheiſm; as I ſuppoſe that their predeceſſors the brachmans had. They hold the prae-exiſtence and tranſmigration of ſouls; they abſtain from fleſh; they retain the notions of pollution and purification; they waſh away ſins in the waters of the Ganges; they pretend to abſtract themſelves from ſenſe, and to contemplate the Supreme Being by intenſe meditation. The brachmans were poſſibly a ſect of gymnoſophiſts: and there are at this time joghis and faquirs in the Eaſt, who carry their auſterity and penance to ſuch ſurpriſing exceſs, that the carthuſian monks, or thoſe of La Trappe, compared with them, may paſs for ſects of luxurious ſybarites. Should any of theſe reverend fathers hear it ſaid, that they are deſcended from antient, and outdone by modern idolaters, they would be extremely ſcandaliſed:

ſcandaliſed: and yet nothing is more true. It is as true, as it is to ſay that they ſerve the ſame purpoſes.

WHILST the eyes of mankind were dazzled by theſe appearances of ſanctity which ſome few of the religious ſociety, who devoted themſelves without knowing that they did ſo for the reſt, held forth, the reſt purſued the deſigns of their ambition with great art, and uninterrupted perſeverance. They could not have been atchieved with leſs of either; for even contrary ſyſtems were made to co-operate in promoting them, poverty and riches, humility and oſtentation, the want and the exceſs of authority and power. This I mean. The ſecular clergy not only ſcreened themſelves behind the apparent ſanctity of the regular, which caſt a luſtre on the whole church; they not only impoſed by the religious merit of others, but they accuſtomed the world by degrees to reverence them for the wealth and dignities they enjoyed, and for the pomp and magnificence with which they affected to appear. As the true ſpirit of religion decayed, and as that of ſuperſtition took it's place, this was more eaſily brought about: and he, who imagined that he paid honor to a ſucceſſor of the apoſtles, paid it in reality to the patriarch, the primate, or the metropolitan; dignities which eccleſiaſtical ambition had aſſumed, on the model of thoſe which had been created in the ſtate.

THE eaſtern church roſe by much the ſame means, but could never riſe to the ſame power, as that of the Weſt. Many reaſons of this difference will occur to thoſe, who are converſant in the hiſtory of the church, and in that of the latter empire. I ſhall inſiſt on one, which was the principal, and in the conſequences of which the weſtern provinces were moſt concerned in thoſe days, as they were alone concerned afterwards. The reaſon is this. The opportunities, of advancing early and ſucceſs-

ſucceſsfully towards a monarchical form of government, were much more favorable in the Weſt than in the Eaſt. The patriarchs had a ſort of tetrarchical, or ethnarchical authority, for I ſuppoſe it is not eaſy to diſtinguiſh them, and beſides thoſe enſigns of honor, which primates and metropolitans affected to have as well as they, the patriarchs aſſumed one which had belonged to the emperors ſolely, and enjoyed it in common with them; that I mean of lights or fires carried in ſolemn pomp before them. From the inſtitution of this dignity there were three patriarchs, the patriarchs of Rome, of Antioch, and of Alexandria. He of Rome remained alone in the Weſt; but in the Eaſt two others were added, a patriarch of Conſtantinople, and laſt of all a patriarch of Jeruſalem. It is ſaid that the biſhop of Rome, Leo the firſt, oppoſed ſtrenuouſly the erection of this patriarchate. If he did ſo, altho it was evidently an advantage to him that the Eaſt ſhould be divided into many patriarchates, whilſt he alone was patriarch in the Weſt, and might hope to be ſo of the Weſt and the Eaſt too, we may venture to ſay that he did not judge of his true intereſt as nicely as popes have done generally, and as it became him to do in particular, who was thought to join in his conduct the character of the fox to the character, as well as name, of the lion.

Gregory the firſt, and the great as he is called, ſaw the advantage of being ſole patriarch in the Weſt, whilſt there were four biſhops decorated with the ſame title in the Eaſt: and he reſolved to improve it. If this rank had been given on a religious account, it ought to have been given ſurely, in the firſt place, to the biſhop of Jeruſalem; ſince chriſtianity began there, and was propagated originally from thence; tho other churches, thoſe of Antioch, of Alexandria, and of Rome particularly, might ſeem to be co-aeval with it. But theſe were great cities and had great dependences, whilſt Jeruſalem lay in aſhes; from

from which miſerable ſtate ſhe never aroſe to her former grandeur, and whilſt Byzantium was neither an imperial nor a chriſtian city. The pre-eminence of biſhops was determined, in ſome meaſure, by the pre-eminence of cities, ſo that when patriarchs were made, tho theſe were, as biſhops had been, equal in authority, and tho their authority was confined to their patriarchates, and never, I believe, very well aſcertained even in them; yet they might contend for a priority of rank among themſelves, and he who held the firſt rank among them, would hold it of courſe in the whole church. That the pope of Rome, which was the ſole imperial city during the firſt three hundred years of the chriſtian aera, ſhould claim this priority, and that other patriarchs ſhould acquieſce in it, cannot be thought extraordinary, if it ſhould be thought true. They might allow him this primacy, for ought I know. But if they did, they gave him nothing more than a feather to adorn his mitre. Not only other patriarchs were ſtyled by the ſame pompous titles that were given to him, but biſhops too. Popes were contradicted, reproved, cenſured, even by theſe; and nothing can be more evident than this, that they reputed the roman biſhop to be, with regard to them, the firſt among equals, "primus inter pares" only: that is, he was biſhop of the firſt ſee, "primae ſedis," and had on that account a precedency, or nominal primacy. This indeed was little of itſelf, but it might lead to more. A ſeeming primacy might give one that was real: and as titles are often derived from powers, power might be derived in time from this empty title.

THUS the biſhops of Rome, whilſt they were only biſhops, thought; and were, therefore, fond of a title, empty as it was, that could not be conteſted with them, nor was conteſted, till Conſtantinople was built, and the ſeat of the empire tranſlated thither. Then it became diſputable indeed which was the firſt ſee:

ſee: and if the title of oecumenical patriarch, which began to ſteal into uſe, as moſt eccleſiaſtical uſurpations have done, and as, I believe, this did, tho LEO the firſt is ſaid to have refuſed it, could have been obtained by him of Conſtantinople, all the advantages might have been loſt to him of Rome, which he expected to reap with this title from his growing primacy. This GREGORY the firſt ſaw, and he neglected nothing to prevent it. Well may it be ſaid that he neglected, and that he ſtuck at nothing to prevent it, when we conſider the conduct he held towards PHOCAS. MAURITIUS was a good prince. GREGORY, the moſt fawning, the moſt canting, and the moſt ambitious of prieſts, had extolled his charity and his piety too even when he beſeeched the emperor to revoke an edict he had made, and which the good biſhop had executed, however, in the mean time. JOHN, the patriarch of Conſtantinople, paſſed for a pious prelate, and was of ſuch remarkable auſterity, that he acquired the name of the faſter. PHOCAS was the moſt vicious and cruel of men. But JOHN aſſumed the title of oecumenical patriarch: and MAURITIUS favored his pretenſions. Theſe were irremiſſible crimes in both; whilſt the merit of favoring the ambitious humility of GREGORY, who affected to take no higher title than that of ſervant of the ſervants of God, was ſufficient to make a TRAJAN of PHOCAS. This inhuman uſurper, not content to put the empreſs, her three daughters, and almoſt all the relations and friends of MAURITIUS, to death, cauſed the five ſons of his maſter to be murdered * in his preſence, and under the eyes of their father; who was afterwards ſtretched out on the bodies of theſe innocents, and made a ſacrifice, on that bleeding altar, to the ſame unrelenting cruelty. This ſcene of horror communicated none to GREGORY. The revolution, however brought about, gave him, his ſee at leaſt, the victory over his rival: and he thanked God, moſt impi-

* MAIMB. hiſt. du pont. de St. GREG.

ouſly, for it. The three letters which he wrote on this occaſion to PHOCAS and LEONTIA, in all the proſtitution of flattery, the ſolemn reception that he gave their images, which he placed in the oratory of the martyr CAESARIUS, and the prayers which the ſenate and clergy offered up for the proſperity of theſe monſters, in a public thankſgiving, by his direction, are monuments of the infamous methods by which it was thought lawful to promote the deſigns of eccleſiaſtical ambition. GREGORY's deſign ſucceeded; for PHOCAS gave, tho not to him, yet to his ſucceſſors, the title he would not ſuffer the faſting prelate to aſſume. But GREGORY's memory muſt be abhorred by every honeſt mind: and the impudence of your church, forgive the expreſſion, in making this man a ſaint, nor the folly of many in ours who ſpeak of him as ſuch, cannot be attoned for by the modeſty that has been ſhewn in preferring ſcarce any other pope to the ſame rank ſince that time.

THE roman pontiffs had more opportunities, and therefore greater encouragement than any others, to promote theſe deſigns both at home and abroad. There were no patriarchs in the Weſt to ſhare with them the luſtre of this dignity. In a few generations after CONSTANTINE, the empire of the Weſt, which he had weakened, fell into ruins: and as there was no emperor in Italy after the depoſition of AUGUSTULUS by ODOACER, ſo the remains of the imperial dignity in that country were not ſufficient to overſhadow theirs; eſpecially after they founded their primacy no longer on the authority of an imperial reſcript, but on a ſuppoſed divine inſtitution. On the contrary, theirs increaſed as that of the emperors died away. Italy lay expoſed to the invaſions of barbarous nations. So did Gaul, and Britain, and the other provinces. Of all theſe misfortunes, the roman pontiffs made their profit. The pre-eminence they had acquired, and much more their induſtry, their perſeverance, and

and their ſkill, made them in ſome ſort, and on ſeveral occaſions, the protectors of Italy, and of Rome eſpecially. About the middle of the fifth century, ATTILA took Aquilea, Pavia, and Milan, ravaged all the country we call Lombardy, and threatened even Rome. The biſhop of this city went at the head of an embaſſy to him: and tho the fabulous circumſtances, that have been invented to give a miraculous appearance to the ſucceſs of the legation, deſerve our contempt; yet the legation had ſucceſs in appearance, ſince ATTILA, for ſome reaſon or other, left Italy: and Rome was delivered from her fears. In the ſame pontificate, GENSERIC, the Vandal, ſurpriſed and took Rome at the ſolicitation of EUDOXIA, who deſired to revenge the death of one huſband and to get rid of another. The pope, LEO, had not the ſame ſucceſs on this occaſion as on the former *. The arian was not ſo complaiſant as the pagan. Rome was pillaged fourteen days together. But ſome of the churches were ſaved, the town was not burned, nor the people put to the ſword: and all that happened leſs than had been apprehended was imputed to the interceſſion of LEO.

THE hiſtory of this fifth century, and of the three or four that follow, is extremely confuſed and dark: and yet we are able to diſcern a moſt ſurpriſing ſyſtem of political conduct, founded on the ſame principles, and carried on thro the whole time, till that ſpiritual tyranny, which had done ſo much miſchief under an ariſtocratical form before, and has made ſuch havoc in the world ſince under the monarchical form, was fully eſtabliſhed. I touch the ſubject lightly, but I muſt ſay ſomething more upon it.

* MAIMB. hiſt. du pont. de St. LEON.

SECTION XXXIII.

THE biſhops of Rome had, beſides the advantages they procured to themſelves, and thoſe that time and accidents put into their hands, one original advantage which has been hinted at already, of the greateſt importance to them at Rome, and every where elſe, from an habitual reſpect, that the ſubjects of the empire retained, and the conquerors of the weſtern provinces contracted, for the antient capital of the empire. It was natural for the Romans, when Rome became chriſtian, to deſire, that their biſhop ſhould repreſent the ſovereign pontiff, who had reſided among them whilſt they were heathens. Laical vanity might, and eccleſiaſtical ambition could not fail to deſire this. The conſent of both made all the papal uſurpations eaſy: and the people in general liked better a voluntary ſubjection, for ſuch it was at firſt, to their biſhops, than a forced ſubjection to prefects or any other imperial officers. The popes took the pomp and ſtate of the pontifex maximus, before they aſſumed the title: and the conteſts about their elections, bloody conteſts in the ſtreets and in the churches too, ſhewed what an object of ambition the biſhopric of Rome was, even before the deſtruction of the weſtern empire. Theſe pontiffs, in truth, derived their ſovereignty more properly from NUMA than from CHRIST: and pagan prejudices had ſome effect, even when the world was become chriſtian, in creating a reſpect for them. The title of oecumenical biſhop extended, and realiſed, in ſome inſtances, their claims. But the title of biſhops of the eternal city helped the impoſition. This impoſition of the popes did not prevail much among the arians; becauſe of their oppoſition to arianiſm, and therefore, as they perſecuted this ſect, wherever they had power to do it, they were obſequious enough to arian princes, under whom they had not this power: an example whereof might be taken from the

the embaſſy of one of theſe popes, whoſe name I do not remember, and whom THEODORIC ſent to JUSTIN to perſuade that emperor to ſhew more indulgence to the arians in his dominions, leſt the gothic king ſhould take repriſals on the orthodox in the Weſt. But wherever orthodoxy prevailed, theſe titles procured a great regard to the ſee of Rome, and an influence which the popes improved directly and indirectly, to confirm their authority where it was acknowledged, and to propagate it, under the notion of converſions to chriſtianity, where it was not acknowledged.

THIS calls to my mind the miſſion, that GREGORY, the ſame I have ſpoken of already, ſent into Britain. This example will ſhew what that chriſtianity was which the popes propagated; and how the groſſeſt frauds, that iniquity ever invented, or impudence impoſed, were eſtabliſhed under that venerable name. BRUNEHAULT, queen of France, muſt paſs for one of the worſt women that ever lived; if the general conſent of hiſtorians can eſtabliſh a character. GREGORY held an intimate correſpondence with this woman: and this intimacy with her, and with PHOCAS, is ſuch a brand on his memory, that we might be ſurpriſed to find his name in the calendar of your ſaints, if we did not find that of another GREGORY, GREGORY the ſeventh, there. BRUNEHAULT was extremely liberal to the eccleſiaſtical order. She built churches, founded convents, and had a great devotion to relics. So much liberality, and ſo much ſuperſtition, might have made a ſaint even of her too, notwithſtanding her crimes: and ſhe might have ſtood over your altars in company with her panegyriſt. This pious queen contributed not only to maintain the authority of the biſhop of Rome in France, where it was reſpected already, but to propagate it, where it was not yet known; for it is plain, that the converſion of the Saxons to papal chriſtianity

ſtianity was concerted with her. The more immediate inſtrument of this converſion indeed was BERTHE daughter of CHARIBERT king of France, and wife of ETHELBERT king of the ſouth Saxons. She protected, ſhe introduced the miſſionaries: and the king and his ſubjects were converted to the roman religion.

I DO not ſpeak improperly, when I ſay the roman religion: for altho GREGORY ſays, in a letter to BRUNEHAULT, only this, that "he heard the church of England had a mind to become "chriſtian *;" yet is it certain, that the Saxons had the knowledge of chriſtianity, as it was taught in the firſt ages, before AUSTIN and his monks came to preach it as it had been modelled, and, to ſpeak plainly, corrupted in the church of Rome and the other chriſtian churches. The Britons had been converted long before to the chriſtian religion: and the Saxons had a knowledge of it from them. On this ſuppoſition we may account, and on any other it is impoſſible to account, for the obſtinate adherence of the Saxons, after their ſuppoſed converſion by AUSTIN, to the aſiatic and moſt antient rule of celebrating eaſter, which had been changed in the church of Rome, and which AUSTIN oppoſed. The Britons had been driven into a remote corner of the world: and the Saxons were a greater barrier than the ſea itſelf between them and the continent. They retained, therefore, their religion as they had received it, and knew nothing of the additions that had been made to it ſince the time of their converſion, nor particularly any thing of the roman biſhop's pretenſions to a ſupremacy. As they knew, ſo they might, and ſo I believe they did, teach the Saxons: and it was neither hard for one to teach, nor for the other to learn, chriſtianity, in a ſimplicity

* Indicamus ad nos perveniſſe eccleſiam anglicanam velle fieri chriſtianam. lib. 5. ep. 59.

that

that came nearer to that wherein CHRIST had taught it to the poor and the ignorant. But this was to be unlearned: and the ſole object of AUSTIN's miſſion was to teach both Britons and Saxons a new-fangled chriſtianity, and to inſpire them with a fooliſh reſpect for ſuperſtitious uſages, and with an abject ſubmiſſion to the ſee of Rome. That theſe were the points he labored, appears from all we know of the conduct he held, from his diſputes with the Britons, from the inſtructions he aſked, and from thoſe which the pope gave him. The height to which he carried his legatine power, and the inſolence with which he treated the britiſh biſhops, demonſtrate the ſpirit in which he came, and the purpoſe he came for. The declaration, that theſe biſhops ſent him, or the abbot of Bangor by their direction, was modeſt but firm. They declared themſelves ſubject to the church of God, and to the pope of Rome. But how? As they were to every godly Chriſtian, &c. Other obedience than this, they ſay to AUSTIN, that they do not know to be due to him whom he called pope: and that they were under the government of the biſhop of Caerleon upon Uſke, &c.

THE Britons ſtood out againſt the uſurpations of the popes many centuries. But the Saxons ſoon crouched under them. The Saxons were a fierce and a free, but they were an ignorant people: and therefore falſe notions of chriſtian inſtitution were eaſily impoſed upon them. From notions thus impoſed, the clergy derived pretenſions to ſuch powers, ſuch immunities, and ſuch pre-eminence of rank and dignity, as raiſed the biſhops to an equality with princes and kings in ſome reſpects, and to a ſuperiority over them in as many as were, or could be made to ſeem relative to religion; for in theſe "omnibus dignitati-" bus praeſunt" was a maxim which they had the front to avow, and which the civil ſociety were ſtupid enough to admit.

mit. What they pretended to belong to them, they aſſumed: and what they aſſumed they juſtified by canons, that is, by laws of their own making. The eccleſiaſtical roman yoak was ſo well fixed on the necks of the Saxons, that it grew more and more confirmed, till the Normans came in, and then it did not become lighter; for they brought the ſame prejudices along with them*: ſo that our iſland was a province, and a farm, to the court of Rome near five hundred years longer. How eaſy ſoever it would be to deſcend into all theſe particulars, I ſhould find it tedious: and you know that I never engaged to write treatiſes, nor any thing more than eſſays; if my part in our occaſional converſations, extended on paper, can deſerve even that name. But ſince I mentioned the few falſe notions, concerning chriſtian inſtitution, that impoſed on the Saxons, and ſince I think the uſurpations of the religious ſociety have been founded every where elſe on the ſame, I will endeavor to expoſe them to you in a few words, to ſhew you how the firſt deception aroſe in the whole chriſtian commonwealth, and how the monarchical tyranny of the biſhop of Rome was grafted on it.

SECTION XXXIV.

I AM not a diſciple of HOBBES, but I embrace truth wherever I find it, or whoever ſhews it to me: and he ſhews it to me, I think, when he maintains, that the preſent church of CHRIST, by which we mean in this place the whole body of Chriſtians, is not the kingdom of CHRIST. This opinion, however, that it is ſo, grew early into belief, and will be ſupported as long as that order of men can ſupport it, who have aſſumed, under pretence of being appointed to govern and adminiſter in it, an

* Vid. BACON's treatiſe from SELDEN's notes.

eſtabliſh-

eſtabliſhment diſtinct from the civil, and a moſt unreaſonable and unequal ſhare of wealth and power in almoſt every chriſtian ſtate. No opinion, however, can be more evidently falſe. The expreſs declaration which CHRIST made when he ſaid, "my kingdom is not of this world," the conduct he held, the doctrines he taught, and the commiſſion he gave to his apoſtles, prove it to be ſo. If it had been the divine intention to eſtabliſh, at that time, the kingdom of CHRIST, he would have appeared, no doubt, more conformably to the expectations of the Jews in majeſty and power. But they miſtook the ſenſe of their prophecies, it ſeems; their expectations were vain, and the purpoſes of infinite wiſdom opened themſelves in a very different manner.

THE Meſſiah ſhewed himſelf to the world in the loweſt form of life, and avoided all appearances of affecting any higher rank, even that of the Meſſiah, which was diſtinguiſhed from that of king; tho the Jews, miſled by their prophecies, could not conceive the two characters to be diſtinguiſhable. He came not to reign, but to redeem; not to triumph, but to ſuffer; not to erect a kingdom, but to prepare men for that which was to be erected at his ſecond coming. It may ſeem ſtrange, that he could conceal himſelf, notwithſtanding the ſigns and wonders that illuſtrated his birth, the proclamation of him from above at the time of his baptiſm, and all the miracles which he wrought, chiefly indeed out of Jeruſalem, during the time of his miniſtry. But it is not ſtrange, that he uſed all the means of keeping up this concealment of himſelf to the laſt, and in a great degree even from his diſciples, on the hypotheſis here mentioned. If he had declared himſelf publicly and plainly to be the Meſſiah, either the Jews would have taken him by force to make him king, as St. JOHN tells us, that they

who had ſeen his miracles were ready to do *; or they would have looked on him, from the firſt, as an impoſtor, ſince he pretended to be the Meſſiah, and yet aſſumed no dominion, nor claimed any kingdom. In one caſe, the deſign of his coming would have been entirely perverted. In the other, the Jews might have laid immediate hold on him, and have taken away his life. In neither, could he have had the means, nor the time neceſſary to perform all the purpoſes of his miſſion, and to fulfil all the prophecies according to his own applications of them.

To prevent theſe effects of the miſtaken zeal of the Jews, and to keep himſelf in the ſtate of an innocent man towards the roman government, without being at the expence of more miracles for theſe purpoſes according to Mr. Locke, his conduct was reſerved and cautious, his language myſtical and parabolical. But the repeated declarations he made, during the courſe of his miſſion, that his kingdom was not of this world, were ſufficient to keep him from being obnoxious to the Romans: and tho he owned himſelf to Pilate the king of a world to come, we ſee that Pilate found no fault in him, and that he declared him an innocent man, when he delivered him up to the Jews to be crucified. For what concern could Pilate or his maſter imagine they had in a world that was to come, in a future kingdom, in a kingdom of God, in a kingdom of heaven? In this manner, one part of the ſavior's intentions was anſwered. His innocence was averred. But there was another part. He was not only to be innocent, he was to die innocent: and of this he made the Jews the inſtruments by a ſequel of the moſt artful behavior, which Mr. Locke developes with a ſagacity that might give envy to the deepeſt

* Reaſonab. of chriſtian.

divine,

divine, that ever undertook to diſcover the oeconomy of infinite wiſdom.

He contrived to appear guilty to the Jews, by the ſame declaration by which he appeared innocent to the Romans. He appeared a very extraordinary perſon to both: and well he might; but he ſpoke plainly to one as far as they were concerned, and darkly and ambiguouſly to the other. He pretended to no kingdom: Caesar had no rival in him. But for this very reaſon, he became criminal to the Jews. The miracles he performed, the obſcure expreſſions he let drop, induced ſome of the people to take him for the prophet that was to come, for the Meſſiah. But the ſcribes, the phariſees, and the bulk of the people, who hearkened, as he had bid them hearken, to thoſe who ſate in the ſeat of Moses, could not eaſily take him for the Meſſiah, conſiſtently with their prejudices; ſince he aſſumed no kingdom, nor pretended to any. Nay more, they could not have taken him eaſily for the Meſſiah, if they had been able to diſtinguiſh between the Meſſiah and the king; ſince he diſguiſed one of theſe characters, as he diſowned the other. This extraordinary perſon, therefore, was, according to their logic, an impoſtor. They were a rejected people, for not believing him to be the Meſſiah, on the faith of his miracles: and he kept them in this error. At leaſt he did nothing to draw them out of it, that they might bring him to the croſs, when his time ſhould be come, and complete the redemption of mankind, without knowing what they did, but at their own expence.

He paſſed for a Galilean, tho he was born at Bethlehem, by which one proof of his being the Meſſiah was ſuppreſſed. Even his precurſor, he who had baptiſed him, he who had been a witneſs when he baptiſed him of the deſcent of the holy

ghoſt upon him, and had heard a voice from heaven declare "this is my beloved ſon in whom I am well pleaſed," which voice, therefore, muſt have been the voice of God the father, even he did not know certainly that the ſon of God was the Meſſiah. When JOHN was in priſon, he ſent to aſk JESUS, ſo little did he know him to be the Meſſiah, "art thou he that ſhould come, or do we expect another?" The anſwer JESUS made was an appeal to his miracles, which proved him to be a very extraordinary perſon indeed, but which did not prove him in thoſe days, and ad homines, to be the Meſſiah; for a belief of the powers of magic was not as ridiculous then as it is now, and the phariſees had prepared the people to believe theſe very miracles wrought by BEELZEBUB. The anſwers he gave on other occaſions were not leſs equivocal, nor the language he held about himſelf at any time more explicit, than that wherein he declares himſelf the light of the world as long as he is in the world. He was ſo apprehenſive of being taken for the Meſſiah, leſt he ſhould be taken for a king too, that he ſcarce owned himſelf even to his diſciples, and that he commanded the devils who proclaimed him to be ſo, when he caſt them out, to ſay nothing of it. If he declared himſelf more openly, juſt before his death, to be the Meſſiah, he claimed to the laſt no actual kingdom, no kingdom of this world, neither before his death nor after it, till he ſhould come again in the glory of his father, with his angels to judge the world, and to render to every man according to his works.

THE reſurrection, the aſcenſion of CHRIST, and the coming of the paraclete or comforter who was to ſhew the diſciples all things, and bring to their remembrance all things which he had ſaid, made them underſtand more clearly and believe more firmly that he was the Meſſiah and the king. The prophets had ſpoken of him under both theſe characters confuſedly: and the

Jews

Jews had been led, by theſe prophecies and by their partial interpretations of them, to imagine not only, that the Meſſiah and the king were to be one and the ſame perſon, in which they did not deceive themſelves, but that all the glorious things, which had been foretold of him, were to happen at once, and as ſoon as he ſhould appear, in which they flattered and deceived themſelves very fatally. The diſciples ſaw now, what they had not ſeen fully and clearly before. They ſaw that the two characters, and the offices belonging to each, were to be diſtinguiſhed. They ſaw that their maſter had already appeared in one, and had performed and ſuffered all that belonged to it. They believed, therefore, that he would ſoon appear in the other, as he gave them reaſon to expect he would according to their apprehenſions; that his kingdom, for the coming of which he had taught them to pray, would then come; and that when he was ſeated in the throne of his glory, his immediate diſciples ſhould alſo ſit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Iſrael. He redeemed mankind at his firſt coming, and taught and exhorted them to prepare for his ſecond, when they, who have believed in him, are to enjoy a glorious immortality. Then, and not till then, his kingdom will begin, properly and truly called ſo. The intermediate time is a time of regeneration and preparation. Divines talk of a kingdom of grace, but the expreſſion is figurative, and apt to convey a falſe idea. The kingdom of glory alone is CHRIST's kingdom. He inſtituted none that was to precede it. He exerciſed no dominion, no co-ercive power, nor delegated any to be exerciſed by others.

IF any ſuch had been delegated by him, it would have been ſo, doubtleſs, to his immediate diſciples the apoſtles, and to the ſeventy *. But when we examine their commiſſion, we find

* N. B. I ſay the ſeventy both here and elſewhere, in conformity to the general run

find nothing of this kind in it. They were commiſſioned to teach or to preach to all nations, or, perhaps, to the loſt ſheep of Iſrael diſperſed into all nations, that JESUS was the Meſſiah. They were authoriſed to ſay, after their maſter, that his kingdom would come, that it was at hand, that they who received them, and the goſpel they taught, would be received into it, and that the ſtate of thoſe cities, who received them not, would be in that day, the day when the kingdom of CHRIST ſhould come, leſs tollerable than that of Sodom. They were to baptiſe ſuch as believed: and this baptiſm or waſhing was made a ſign of regeneration, and admiſſion into the church of CHRIST here, in order to admiſſion into his kingdom hereafter. CHRIST gave his apoſtles another power, which ſeems to be conſequential to that of baptiſing, and therefore connected with it, the power of remitting or retaining ſins. Tho I do not pretend to dogmatiſe about the nature and extent of this power, yet I may pretend to ſay what it is not, and to what it does not extend. It is not a power to forgive or not to forgive, to cancel or not to cancel, ſins, abſolutely and definitively. Such a power belongs to the great ſearcher of hearts alone. The apoſtles might admit thoſe, who profeſſed their belief in CHRIST by baptiſm, into the church, and retain them in it as long as they held the ſame faith and brought forth fruits meet for repentance. They not only might, but it was their duty to do ſo, and St. JOHN cenſures very ſeverely DIOTREPHES, in his third epiſtle, for a contrary practice. If he who had offended on any occaſion appeared to be penitent, he might be abſolved, that is, his ſins were remitted, and he was retained in the chriſtian church. If he was impenitent, he could not be abſolved; his ſins were retained, and he was to the brethren as an heathen man and a publican.

run of orthodox opinion, tho I know that we have no authority, but that of St. LUKE, for aſſuming this diſtinct number of diſciples.

In

In theſe caſes, as in that of baptiſm, the apoſtles and their ſucceſſors were merely miniſters, who performed a ceremony, or pronounced a judgment. They could not refuſe baptiſm to believers: and it was not they, but the church, the congregation of the faithful properly, who retained an offender in their body by remitting his ſins, or drove him out by retaining them; that is, by refuſing to remit them: for which aſſertion we have the authority of CHRIST, in the eighteenth chapter of St. MATTHEW's goſpel, and that of St. PAUL's example in his proceeding with regard to the fornicator in the church of Corinth.

THIS power, which CHRIST gave to his diſciples and to his church, was ſo far from being a co-ercive power, ſuch a power as kings delegate, and thoſe who govern under them exerciſe, ſuch a power, in ſhort, as may ſerve to ſhew that he meaned to eſtabliſh any kingdom in this world, that it ſhews the very contrary. "Whoſeſoever ſins ye remit, they are remitted unto "them, and whoſeſoever ſins ye retain, they are retained." Again "whatſoever ye ſhall bind on earth ſhall be bound in "heaven, and whatſoever ye ſhall looſe on earth ſhall be looſed "in heaven." Theſe expreſſions, taken together, point at the other world, the world to come; and the full effect of the promiſes and threatnings they contain is to be expected there, not here. In this intermediate ſtate of preparation and probation, all that they, who are appointed miniſters of the goſpel, as ſuch can do, by virtue of the power delegated by the firſt paſſage, is to adviſe, exhort, admoniſh, and to ſeparate themſelves, and to perſuade the faithful to ſeparate, from the impenitent and refractory. This is all the power which the firſt of theſe paſſages gives. The ſecond gives no farther power, but it contains a promiſe which muſt not be underſtood according to the natural import of the words, nor without very great mitigations

gations of the ſenſe; leſt it ſhould be underſtood to imply ſuch an abſurdity as it would be impious to impute to the word of God, how deſirous ſoever divines may be to have it ſo underſtood. It would imply that CHRIST, when he comes at the laſt day in the glory of his father, and to eſtabliſh his kingdom, will not come to judge the world, or the chriſtian part of it at leaſt, but merely to execute judgments already given, the judgments of the church. In ſhort, CHRIST gave no co-ercive power to his apoſtles: and they who ſucceeded them exerciſed none, till they obtained it, or ſtole it, from the kings whoſe kingdoms were of this world. Then, indeed, excommunications grew co-ercive, and ſeverely ſo: and powers that were tyrannical in their execution, and civil in their origin, began to paſs for eccleſiaſtical and lawful powers, in the hands of men who had no right by their inſtitution to any that are co-ercive or penal. But if that were true, which is evidently falſe, that CHRIST had given ſuch powers to his apoſtles, as their ſucceſſors claim and exerciſe too, wherever they are ſuffered to do ſo, yet there would be no reaſon to allow this claim now, nor was there any to allow it even in the primitive ages of chriſtianity. CHRIST breathed on his apoſtles, bid them receive the holy ghoſt, and we are bound to believe that he inſpired the ſame ſpirit into them by this act, which deſcended afterwards more manifeſtly upon them and the diſciples under the figure of firey tongues. The gifts of the ſpirit were then common, and evidenced themſelves by ſanctity of life, and by many other unequivocal ſigns. But theſe ſigns, ſanctity of life and miraculous operations, ſoon failed. Prieſts after that might blow on other prieſts, lay their hands on them, and bid them receive the holy ghoſt. But it was ſilly and impious both to perſuade the civil ſociety of Chriſtians, that ſuch prieſts, as theſe were generally, could either give or be worthy to receive the holy ghoſt. This they did however, and it was neceſſary to carry on this illuſion, that

that they might carry on the other. As ſoon as they had perſuaded that the church of CHRIST was the kingdom of CHRIST, and that this order of men was appointed to govern in it, there was a neceſſity of perſuading likewiſe, that the ſame ſpirit, the ſame gifts and graces, which CHRIST had beſtowed on the apoſtles for the eſtabliſhment of his church, were conveyed down for the government of it by their order.

IF we had leſs experience of the powerful effects of ambition, avarice, and ſuperſtition, we might be ſurpriſed that ſome men have been hardy enough to aſſert, and others weak enough to believe, againſt the expreſs declarations of CHRIST himſelf, that his kingdom is of this world, and that it began immediately after his firſt coming; tho he fixed the commencement of it, at his ſecond coming, the time of which he left uncertain. There are many dark paſſages in the goſpels, and when there are no others relative to any particular ſubject, the preſumption of theology has a full ſcope. But when there are paſſages, the ſenſe of which is determined and plain, theſe are to guide us to the ſenſe of thoſe that are ambiguous and obſcure. To take a contrary method, to explain and pretend to fix the ſenſe of what is clear by what is dark, may be called ſubtilty and deep penetration; but ſure I am it deſerves to be called abſurd and impudent impoſition. This now is the very thing that has been done in the caſe before us. Divines of all ages, all countries and ſects have done it. They do it ſtill: and BEZA and BELLARMINE, who agreed in nothing elſe, agreed in this.

I MENTION BEZA particularly, becauſe he inferred, as I learn from HOBBES, that the commencement of the kingdom of God ſhould be placed at the reſurrection of CHRIST, from a paſſage in the goſpel of MARK. In that, the words JESUS is recorded to have ſpoken are theſe: "verily I ſay unto you, that there

" be ſome of them who ſtand here, which ſhall not taſte of " death till they have ſeen the kingdom of God come with " power." Theſe words, like thoſe which he ſpoke of St. JOHN to St. PETER, " if I will that he tarry till I come, what " is that to thee?" are very dark indeed. They plainly relate to his ſecond coming, which is characteriſed by coming with power. But then it will follow, that the perſons ſpoken of are ſtill alive; which might have paſſed among the good people of Epheſus, who believed, in St. AUSTIN's time, that St. JOHN was ſtill alive, and only ſlept in his grave: and would not paſs, I preſume, in theſe days. Shall we accept the conjecture of HOBBES? He thinks, that the words related to the transfiguration, of which PETER and JAMES and JOHN, ſome, not all, who ſtood by JESUS when he ſpoke them, were witneſſes. He thinks, that theſe diſciples, having ſeen CHRIST in glory and majeſty, as he is to appear at his ſecond coming, the promiſe was accompliſhed by way of viſion. But this is conjecture only, and, tho ingenious, yet forced and certainly not ſerious; for if theſe diſciples did ſee him, they ſaw him in a viſion, and they neither ſaw him come, nor the kingdom of God come, in any propriety of ſpeech. There might be a more probable account given, perhaps, why theſe words were ſpoken according to the natural and obvious ſenſe of them. But I uſe none of the theological liberties of gueſs with holy writ, and I content myſelf to obſerve on this occaſion the abſurdity of that of BEZA. HOBBES takes notice juſtly, that if the kingdom of God was to come, and did come at the reſurrection, the expreſſion was not exact, ſince all the diſciples, not ſome only, lived till CHRIST was riſen from the dead. But the abſurdity of this interpretation is greater ſtill. The aſcenſion followed ſoon the reſurrection. Between theſe two events, CHRIST aſſumed no more dominion than he had done before, nor ſhewed any more ſigns of claiming or exerciſing kingly power. He ſcarce

ſcarce ſhewed himſelf to the few, who were ſaid to have ſeen him, in ſuch a manner as they could know by it, certainly, that it was he whom they had ſeen. I ſay the few, becauſe St. PAUL, who had not probably ever ſeen JESUS, deſerves no credit when he affirms, againſt the whole tenor of the goſpels, that he and above five hundred brethren at once had ſeen him after his reſurrection. Both theſe events, the reſurrection and aſcenſion, paſſed in a very private manner. There were no eye-witneſſes, properly called ſo, of his reſurrection. There were few, of his aſcenſion. But in whatever manner we can ſuppoſe them to have paſſed, if we ſuppoſe him to have riſen from the dead, and to have aſcended into heaven, with the ſame public pomp and majeſty with which he is to be attended when he ſhall come to judge the world, and to eſtabliſh the kingdom he foretold, yet we cannot aſſert that this kingdom came, or began at that time. As God, he reigns eternally; but the kingdom here ſpoken of was to have a beginning, and to ſay that it began when CHRIST, who had not then eſtabliſhed it, returned to reign with his father in the unity of the godhead; or that it came, tho we continue ſtill to pray that it may come, when CHRIST left the earth, or that he veſted the apoſtles, or thoſe who call themſelves their ſucceſſors, with a ſovereignty in this imaginary kingdom, which he never aſſumed himſelf, is one of thoſe paradoxes, which men, who find a color for any in the dark ſayings of the ſcriptures, preſume to advance.

MANY other paradoxes have been built on this, the common foundation of all eccleſiaſtical power: and it has happened in the courſe of theſe uſurpations, as it has happened often in the courſe of others. Whilſt the whole body of the clergy purſued, on one general maxim, an intereſt of ambition common to the whole body, particular members invented other paradoxes, which ſeemed to ariſe out of the firſt, and which became ma-

xims juſt as true as the firſt. Thus, that I may ſay in few words what I mean to ſay, and not to deſcend into a long detail of particulars, eccleſiaſtical as well as civil democracies became ariſtocracies; ariſtocracies became monarchies, and ſeveral monarchies were united into one empire, under thoſe great conquerors, the biſhops of Rome. The chriſtian church bore ſome reſemblance, after the eſtabliſhment of it, to the ſtate of antient Greece. Both were compoſed of ſeveral little governments. They were all Greeks in one, and all Chriſtians in the other; but the quarrels of parties, in each of theſe, as well as the quarrels of one government with another, deſtroyed the public peace, and continued to do ſo notwithſtanding all the judgments of the areopagus and all the decrees of councils. The feuds that aroſe in particular churches gave occaſion or pretence to the inſtitution of biſhops: and thoſe that aroſe between church and church, to the inſtitution of metropolitans, primates, and patriarchs, one of whom pretended at laſt to be the vicar of CHRIST in his imaginary kingdom. In ſhort, the clergy, like other uſurpers, in order to maintain the advantages they had gained over the laity, or to carry their arms abroad in ſearch of more, have found it neceſſary to ſubmit to uſurpations within their own body, and to groan under the very yoak they impoſed.

EVERY innovation has been ſupported by ſome new paradox: and divine right has been claimed by all, on that fundamental paradox, in which they all agree. MARCHMONT will tell you that preſbytery is jure divino. I ſhall tell you that epiſcopacy is ſo: and tho you are not a very good papiſt, you will tell us that popery is ſo. Let us be candid, and confeſs that none of them are ſo. To ſet an example of candor, I will own, that as monſtrous as the papal pretenſions are againſt which we proteſtants exclaim ſo loudly, they may be ſupported, by wreſting and

and torturing the ſcriptures, juſt as well as the principles in which we agree, that the chriſtian church is actually the kingdom of CHRIST, and that a religious ſociety was inſtituted to govern in it by his authority. Theſe principles are laid in direct oppoſition to the plaineſt and moſt poſitive declarations which the Saviour made. But when they are once admitted, BELLARMINE and the other writers for the church and court of Rome are able to defend their monſtrous pretenſions ſo plauſibly to well diſpoſed minds, that inſtead of contradicting the ſcriptures, they ſeem to build upon them, not only on paſſages in the epiſtles of St. PAUL, who boaſted that he was the architect of the ſpiritual houſe, and that he laid the foundations of it, but on the words of CHRIST as they ſtand in ſome paſſages of the goſpels, and to make their work the more ſure, as they imagine abſurdly enough, on paſſages of the old Teſtament as well as of the new. Thus they prove the popes, as ſucceſſors of St. PETER, to be vicars of CHRIST, to be infallible in all their judgments concerning faith and manners, and to have the ſupreme ſpiritual and even temporal power in every chriſtian country. Such are the real pretenſions of your church over all civil power, over all emperors, kings and princes. Such ſaints as your angelical doctor, ſuch writers as BELLARMINE and BARONIUS have affirmed them. Councils have held the ſame language: and all they, who would take the temporal ſword out of the hands of St. PETER, have been branded with hereſy, the hereſy of the politics, "haereſis politicorum." True it is, that ſome of your doctors, and even ſome councils have ſeen the folly, and bluſhed at the impudence of thoſe who have carried theſe pretenſions in favor of the papal authority ſo high. Many have writ againſt them, even in Italy: but both ſides have concurred in giving to the church, underſtanding by the church the eccleſiaſtical order alone, a full and independent power over the ſtate in ſpirituals;

by

by which they ſaw that they might preſerve indirectly a tyranny they could not obtain directly.

SECTION XXXV.

FROM the time of CONSTANTINE to that of CHARLES the great, the wealth and power of the church had grown from age to age, by ſuch means as have been already mentioned: and the authority of that of Rome particularly began to overtop all others, by a ſtupid bigottry that increaſed as ignorance increaſed, and by the artifices which her biſhops employed. But CHARLES the great raiſed theſe biſhops to that exorbitant power and grandeur which inabled them to vex and oppreſs ſome of his own ſucceſſors, and to tyranniſe the whole weſtern world: till in the reign of another CHARLES, ſeveral nations ſhook this yoak off their necks, and made it ſit lighter on the necks of thoſe who did not ſhake it off. When the Lombards had ſettled themſelves in Italy, the popes began to play a game, which they could not play with the ſame advantage, for many reaſons, in the reigns of the gothic kings. They fomented continual quarrels between the exarchs who governed for the conſtantinopolitan emperors, and the Lombards, in order to make their profit of them againſt both: and when they had drawn themſelves into diſtreſs and danger, their refuge for protection was to France. They apprehended leſs the emperors, whoſe government was weak and oppreſſive, deſpiſed therefore and hated, and who were at a greater diſtance from Italy, and careleſs enough about it. They excommunicated the exarchs, and, in the diſpute about image-breaking, the emperor himſelf. GREGORY the ſecond and the third took advantage of this pretended hereſy, and in their zeal for images, which ſuited the humor of the times and the prejudices of the people, the firſt of theſe popes took upon him

him to forbid not only in his own dioceſe, but every where elſe, that the orders of LEO the Iſaurian ſhould be obeyed: and the ſecond excommunicated him, and abſolved his ſubjects from their allegiance to him. Uſurpation was ſoon added to revolt, and the people of Rome were made to ſwear allegiance to the popes. CHARLES MARTEL had abetted theſe ambitious and turbulent prelates againſt the emperor: and, when they were in danger from the Lombards, he ſaved them by the influence he had on LUITPRAND. But CHARLES MARTEL dead, Ravenna taken, and the exarchate conquered, they lay at the mercy of this people, who knew their double dealing, and had ſufficient reaſon to complain of the conduct they had in the revolt of THRASIMOND duke of SPOLETTO, and on other occaſions. This might have defeated all their deſigns; and the power they had acquired might have been cruſhed under that of the Lombards, if they had not improved very dexterouſly a ſingular conjuncture to ruin the Lombards in their turn, and to finiſh on theſe ruins that ſtately edifice of ſpiritual and temporal grandeur which they had advanced very far on thoſe of their antient maſters the emperors.

WHEN PEPIN the ſhort reſolved to take the title, as he had the power, of king of the Franks, he thought it neceſſary, not only to remove all ſcruples from the minds of his people, who might eſteem themſelves bound by their oaths to CHILDERIC and the merovingian race, but to juſtify his new title to other chriſtian nations. He might have done the firſt, perhaps, by ſome ſolemn farce, which his own clergy would have been ready enough to act. But to do both more effectually he choſe to have the farce acted at Rome. He ſent his meſſengers to queſtion the oracle: and ZACHARY gave the beſt reaſon that ever pope, or oracle, gave for the ſentence he pronounced. He pronounced, that the French were no longer bound by their oaths to CHILDERIC; ſince this prince had not kept his engage-

ment

ment to them. The reaſon followed the ſentence; for "ſuch "is the nature of conditional contracts, ſaid ZACHARY, that if "one party fails, the other is abſolved from his promiſe *." This anſwer had a full effect. PEPIN was choſen king, and CHILDERIC depoſed unanimouſly in the national aſſembly that was held at Soiſſons.

IF his holineſs was not paid before hand, as antient oracles were moſt commonly, ZACHARY foreſaw, that the time of payment would ſoon come, and he took the beſt method to ſecure it. He was at peace with the Lombards when he ſolved this famous caſe of conſcience in favor of PEPIN; but as ſoon as they had conquered Ravenna and the Pentapolis, for Italy had a Pentapolis too, ASTOLPHUS their king determined, that the popes, who had been ſubject to the emperors, ſhould be ſubject to him. The good men, who had revolted from their antient maſter, did not care to ſubmit to a new power, the ſeat of which was in Italy, and which would be always at hand to keep them in awe, to controul and to puniſh them. STEPHEN the third was not aſhamed to apply for help to CONSTANTINE, the ſon of that very LEO, who had been treated ſo inſolently by the two GREGORIES. But the emperor having as little concern for the church and people of Rome as they deſerved from him, STEPHEN did at laſt, what ZACHARY, more able than he, would have done at firſt; he had recourſe to PEPIN. He was received in France with more than reſpect, with a ridiculous, and yet in thoſe circumſtances a wiſe appearance of veneration; if it be true, that PEPIN and his ſons threw themſelves at the feet of the prieſt to receive his bleſſing. He conjured them, in eccleſiaſtical cant, to defend the church of Rome, and the ſepulchres of the apoſtles, that is, the dominion and ſovereignty which the popes had uſurped againſt the Lombards.

* MEZERAY.

The

The Lombards were Chriſtians, and meaned no hurt to the religion they profeſſed. But the cauſe of the clergy and the cauſe of religion were made, by the logic of thoſe times, as well as of ours, the ſame, when they were quite diſtinct, and even when they were oppoſite. PEPIN was glad to ſeize an opportunity of ſatisfying, at once, his own ambition and that of the roman biſhops. STEPHEN anointed him, his wife and his children; declared them, after this holy unction, princes by the grace of God; thundered out excommunications againſt all perſons, ſubjects or ſtrangers, who ſhould oppoſe them in any time to come, and confined CHILDERIC on the ſame day to a monaſtery, as he confined the children of CARLOMAN, PEPIN's brother. PEPIN made two expeditions into Italy, reduced the Lombards, uſurped on them the exarchate they had uſurped on the Greeks, and gave it to St. PETER: ſuch was the ſtyle.

CHARLES made ſeveral of theſe expeditions, and in them an abſolute conqueſt of the Lombards. He confirmed what his father had done, and did ſtill more for the church. He gave the exarchate and the five cities to the roman ſee moſt certainly; but it is as certain, that he did not make an abſolute alienation of them, without any reſerve of ſovereignty over the pope and them. His grant of Mantua, of Parma, of the two Sicilies, and of other dominions, is a mere ſuppoſition, and as ill founded as the pretended donation of CONSTANTINE to SYLVESTER and the biſhops of Rome. If this has ſucceeded a little more to their advantage than the other, one reaſon of this ſucceſs may be found, I think, in the paſſages of the time we ſpeak of here. Whatever pope forged the donation of CONSTANTINE, I incline to think that it was forged long before the tenth century, and that it lay dormant, among other records as authentic as itſelf, till an opportunity of employing it to ſome pious uſe was found. Thus it might be employed

as an inducement to PEPIN to make, and as a juſtification of him for making, a grant of the exarchate to the ſee of Rome, without any regard to the rightful claim of the greek emperor: and in this ſenſe I chooſe to underſtand thoſe who have called this grant a reſtitution, as if PEPIN, when he ſeemed to give, did only compound with the popes, who had as good a right as forgery could communicate to the whole weſtern empire.

IN this pretended act, CONSTANTINE is made to declare his intention to be not only that the ſee of Rome ſhould have the ſupremacy over thoſe of Alexandria, Antioch, Jeruſalem, and Conſtantinople; but that the pontifical throne ſhould be exalted glorioufly above the imperial *. He is made to give the palace of Lateran, his diadem, and all his imperial ornaments, to SYLVESTER and the popes his ſucceſſors. He is made to conſtitute the inferior clergy, "romanae eccleſiae ſervientes," in the ranks of patricians and conſuls. In ſhort, he is made to ſay in expreſs terms, that he yields and abandons to SYLVESTER, the univerſal pope, and the pontiffs his ſucceſſors, the city of Rome and all the provinces, places, and towns of Italy; or the occidental regions †: and that for this reaſon he thinks it "congruum" proper to transfer his empire into the Eaſt; ſince it is not juſt, that an earthly emperor ſhould reign where the prince of prieſts, and the head of the chriſtian religion is eſtabliſhed by the emperor of heaven §.

* Amplius quàm noſtrum imperium terrenumque thronum ſedem ſacratiſſimam B. PETRI gloriosè exaltare.

† Contra dentes et relinquentes univerſali papae romanam urbem, et omnes Italiae ſeu occidentalium regionum provincias, loca, et civitates.

§ Quoniam ubi principatus ſacerdotum et chriſtianae religionis caput ab imperatore coeleſti conſtitutum eſt, juſtum non eſt ut illic terrenus imperator habeat poteſtatem.

I HAVE

I HAVE quoted this extraordinary piece a little the more at large, becauſe it has been avowed genuine by the court of Rome, and has been publiſhed as ſuch by one of the LEOS; for which reaſon it may ſtand very properly here as an inſtance of the moſt impudent forgery, which the religious ſociety ever attempted to impoſe on the civil, and may render all that remains to be ſaid of theſe forgeries and uſurpations the more probable. I know that BARONIUS gives it up, and would fain perſuade mankind, that this act was forged by the Greeks to caſt a reproach on the roman church. I know too, that he gives up the decretal epiſtles, and I do not ſuppoſe, that there is any man who would have the front at this time to defend either. But theſe candid acknowledgments come too late, to ſave the honor of Rome. Her advocates defended both, as long as they could impoſe on ignorant ages. Nay they attempted it even after the reſurrection of letters. When theſe impoſitions could paſs no longer, and when they had done the work they were deſigned to do, they were abandoned, as many other forged acts and falſe traditions have been. But are men, who confeſs perjury when they are convicted of it, to be received as good witneſſes in any caſe? I think not, and therefore I inſiſt, that the forgery of the donation, as well as that of the decretals, ſince theſe have been mentioned too, may ſtand as proofs of the little credit we ought to give to any of thoſe that are brought in juſtification of the papal pretenſions to temporal or ſpiritual rights.

THESE rights have in truth no better foundation than the compact I have mentioned between princes and prieſts. It began under CONSTANTINE, but it never appeared ſo groſſly as under PEPIN and CHARLES the great. On which occaſion it may be worth while to obſerve how much a worſe bargain

CONSTANTINE made with the church than the others made with the pope. What CONSTANTINE gave was immediate and real. The returns he had to expect were future, and ſuch as never anſwered his expectations either in his own time, or in that of his ſucceſſors, either in promoting the grandeur, or in ſecuring the peace of the empire. The emperor was the bubble of this bargain. That which PEPIN and CHARLES the great made with the church, already eſtabliſhed and powerful, was better, and in ſome degree the reverſe of the other. Their advantages in this alliance were immediate as well as thoſe of the pope: and who ſhould improve them moſt was left to the ſkill and management of their ſucceſſors. In the mean while, if they could not cheat one another, they bantered the reſt of the world egregiouſly. The pope gave the title of king to PEPIN, and that of emperor to CHARLES. Theſe princes gave temporal dominion to the pope, and raiſed the opinion of his ſpiritual dignity and authority as high as the examples they affected to give of reverence and ſubmiſſion could raiſe it. Thus, by fortifying his uſurpations, they ſtrengthened their own: and whilſt we admire the conqueſts whereby CHARLES extended his empire and that of the pope together, it is impoſſible not to laugh when we figure to ourſelves the two uſurpers kneeling to one another, the emperor aſking the bleſſing of a man he made head of the church, the pope acknowledging the imperial ſovereignty in a man he made head of the empire, and each beſtowing moſt generouſly what neither of them had any right to give.

As theſe alliances were made on principles of human policy, and dictated by private intereſt alone, they were kept accordingly. CHARLES the great ſeemed to foreſee, that the alliance he had made would not be very well obſerved, and that the church would find means to tranſgreſs, inſtead of keeping within

within the bounds of it. He had received his crown from the pope; but he was ſo afraid that future popes might claim from this precedent, ſtrained to their purpoſe, a right to give it, that he would not ſuffer any prelate to ſet it on the head of his ſon, who was elected and crowned in his preſence at Aix. He ordered LEWIS to take it from the altar, and to crown himſelf. But LEWIS profited ill of this leſſon. Even in his reign, the popes, who felt their ſtrength, began to improve every opportunity of extending their prerogatives by encroachments on thoſe that belonged to the emperors. Thus, for inſtance, a LEO preſumed, under the pretence of a conſpiracy againſt himſelf, to condemn capitally ſome perſons without the imperial authority. The matter was examined, but the pope was not cenſured, he was rather ſcreened by the imperial court, as we may preſume from the extreme reſentment which the people of Rome ſhewed after his death, and from all the indignities they offered to his memory. Thus again, a PASCHAL ſeiſed on ſome of the principal men of Rome, officers of the emperor, and free from any crime but that of maintaining the imperial rights. He ordered their eyes to be put out; their hands and feet, and after theſe their heads, to be cut off, in the Lateran palace. An army was ſent to Rome to puniſh this uſurpation of power and exceſs of cruelty. His holineſs purged himſelf of the crime by oath. But his holineſs was forſworn, and having eſcaped the puniſhment, did not ſeem concerned to conceal the perjury; for he declared afterwards, that the perſons he had cauſed to be executed were guilty of high treaſon, which he muſt have underſtood to be high treaſon againſt himſelf, and abſolved the murtherers becauſe they were of St. PETER's family. All this and more that weak prince the Debonnaire endured from the popes, who came to ſuch a pitch of power and inſolence, by the bigottry of the age, and by the advantage they took of the troubles which aroſe in the empire, that

in

in the ſecond generation after CHARLEMAGNE CHARLES the bald was obliged to purchaſe the empire of the pope by very great conceſſions. He quitted all right to juriſdiction in Rome, and the country about it, and inſtead of reſerving to himſelf that of making the election of popes valid by the imperial confirmation, he is ſaid to have yielded that of creating and of crowning emperors to the pope.

SECTION XXXVI.

AN univerſal and public diſſolution of manners, into which the clergy in general had fallen, might have brought diſgrace on the whole order, ſufficient even in thoſe ages to have opened the eyes of the laity, to have ſtopped their profuſe charity to the church, and to have converted their blind ſubmiſſion into a juſt indignation. But, beſides the favorable circumſtance already mentioned, that apparent ſanctity of the few which ſerved to ſcreen the vices of the many, it is true that this diſſolution of manners received ſome checks from time to time. One of theſe I will point out. The ſynod, or the aſſembly of the ſtates, for it conſiſted of laity and clergy both, which was held at Aix in the reign of the Debonnaire made ſome reformation in convents, where the debauchery was ſcandalous beyond all meaſure. Rules were eſtabliſhed of ſtricter diſcipline for monks and nuns, and the epiſcopal order was reſtrained from ſome exceſſes. Biſhops were forbid to adorn their habits with gold and jewels, to wear ſwords and belts, to dreſs in ſcarlet and to make war. I am far from believing, that new conſtitutions made, or old ones renewed, had an entire effect, or produced a real reformation, but they might ſave ſome of the worſt appearances, which was enough for a church wherein a ſpirit of policy, not a ſpirit of religion, prevailed. Thus much

much too might be eaſily brought about, when the exerciſes of true piety were changed into ſuperſtitious practices; when it coſt ſo little to be a good biſhop, a good prieſt, a good monk, or a great ſaint, that it was neceſſary rather to diſguiſe than to reſtrain their paſſions; and when theſe men could acquire ſuch holy characters by no greater merit than this, and even make themſelves amends for diſguiſing or reſtraining ſome of their paſſions by indulging others. Pride, revenge, avarice, and ambition, had only their names to change, and their effects were conſecrated with the greateſt applauſe. It is eaſy to conceive too, that theſe vices of the mind were purſued with greater application, and by more perſons in the common cauſe of the church, when ſenſuality and debauchery were a little more reſtrained; and that this kind of reformation, inſtead of making the clergy better men, made them only more dangerous enemies of the ſtate.

LAYMEN aſſiſted to reform the clergy without much ſucceſs, churchmen continued to incroach on the laity with great ſucceſs, and the breach of that alliance which PEPIN and his ſon CHARLES the great had lately made between the imperial and papal power, as CONSTANTINE had made one before between the monarchy and the hierarchy, grew wider and wider, and diſturbed the whole chriſtian world. It could not happen otherwiſe, when once the biſhops of Rome had reſolved to be monarchs as well as the emperors, their rivals at leaſt, perhaps their maſters; and when they had acquired ſtrength ſufficient, which they were not long in acquiring to make theſe attempts. Examples may be produced of churchmen, and aſſemblies of churchmen, who have oppoſed, on ſome few occaſions, the moſt violent exceſſes of papal tyranny. The particular motives they had are not always developed in hiſtory. But particular and temporary motives, ariſing from particular conjunctures, they muſt

muſt have had, whenever they held ſuch a conduct. Tho they had ſome dependance ſtill on princes, even when the popes were grown bold enough to claim and exerciſe over theſe a moſt exorbitant power, yet their dependence on the pope was double wherever his ſupremacy was eſtabliſhed; which I preſume to have been the caſe in all the chriſtian countries of the Weſt ſoon after the end of the eighth century. Princes had it in their power to ſhew favor, in many reſpects, and to deal out ſome degrees and kinds of puniſhment to the members of the religious ſociety, as we have accuſtomed ourſelves in this eſſay to call the clergy. The popes had their ſhare of this influence too, and their ſhare was, on the whole, the greateſt. But there was another influence, ariſing from another intereſt, which centered in them alone.

Of this influence princes could have no ſhare; for it aroſe from an intereſt contrary to theirs. Princes and prieſts had agreed in incroaching on the rights of the civil ſociety, according to the true ſpirit of their alliance, whilſt the government of the church was ariſtocratical. But when it became monarchical the ſcene was changed. The groundleſs diſtinction between ſpiritual and temporal power had been long eſtabliſhed, and had taken full poſſeſſion of the minds of men. The former had been exerciſed from the time of Constantine, with no ſmall confuſion, by different churches, in different countries, and in all with much dependance on the civil power, and a real ſubordination to it. But Charles the great did, in effect and in conſequence, unite the diſperſed powers of the weſtern church under one direction, and raiſe the pope from an oecumenical biſhop, with limited and diſputed prerogatives, to be a ſpiritual emperor, with a large ſhare of temporal dominion. This new eccleſiaſtical conſtitution, for ſuch it may be truly called, which he made, or to which he gave occaſion, might be of immediate

mediate advantage in many reſpects of ambition to himſelf. But this, like many other temporary expedients, proved fatal in it's conſequences. As the diviſion of the Lombards into ſeveral dukedoms weakened their power, and prepared the way to the deſtruction of it; ſo the union of all the churches of the Weſt under one head ſtrengthened eccleſiaſtical power, and prepared the way to all the conqueſts it made. As ſoon as the religious ſociety had an emperor of their own order at their head, the ſucceſſors of CHARLES had no longer a prevailing influence over them. They thought it no longer neceſſary to keep fair with thoſe princes, to help them and to be helped by them in plundering and ſubduing the civil ſociety, as they had done before. They affected independency on all authority that was not eccleſiaſtical, and hoped to obtain, by conquering the emperors themſelves under the papal banners, much greater advantages than thoſe they had obtained already by their alliance with the imperial authority.

THE conteſts which the popes, ſupported by this ſpirit in the clergy, raiſed, under the immediate ſucceſſors of CHARLES the great, continued during the courſe of many ages, and brought infinite miſchief, as well as diſgrace, on chriſtianity that was not anſwerable for either. The points in diſpute were few, but they were very important: and to ſuffer a deciſion of them in favor of the popes, was nothing leſs than to acknowledge their ſovereignty in every chriſtian ſtate, as well as their ſupremacy in every chriſtian church. The emperors conferred benefices, and inveſted the prelates by the ſtaff and the ring. The election of the popes themſelves, how much ſoever they had been raiſed above all other biſhops, was ſo far from being independent on the emperors, that it was not reputed valid till it had been confirmed by them nor did they confirm it till the perſon elected had taken an oath of ſubmiſſion and obedience to

them. One of theſe prerogatives was neceſſary to maintain that ſhare of influence which they had left themſelves over the clergy in their own dominions, and the other to check the farther growth of that monarchical power which they had helped, as well as ſuffered, the popes to aſſume in the church, and which the eccleſiaſtics were but too ready in every place to abet; for the biſhops did not ſeem to perceive either time enough or ſtrongly enough what chains they were preparing for themſelves. Both the prerogatives were the more neceſſary to be maintained, ſince CHARLES the great had thrown ſo immenſe a ſhare of temporal power into the hands of the prelates as well as of the popes, by the earldoms, baronies, and other eſtates of much authority as well as dignity in the empire, which he gave them. Beſides which, it is to be conſidered, that if any of the power which the emperors exerciſed in the inveſtitures was uſurped, it was uſurped on the chriſtian congregations, not on the popes: and if the popes had uſurped this power out of the empire, in Britain and elſewhere, the emperors might very well think it too much to ſuffer, that they ſhould profit of their own uſurpations, and of thoſe which had been made by others. As to the ſuperiority of the imperial over the pontifical authority in general, it had not only been acknowledged in the days of heathen emperors and heretic princes, ſuch as the gothic kings were, but it had been exerciſed by the greek emperors in matters of doctrine as well as diſcipline, and had been recogniſed moſt ſolemnly in the days of CHARLEMAGNE, in every reſpect of dominion and diſcipline at leaſt. Many authentic monuments proved the acknowledgment: and the recognition of the imperial ſovereignty was ſo recent, when the popes began to ſhake it off, that as no impudence leſs than that of the court of Rome could deny it, no ingratitude leſs than that of the popes could forget ſo ſoon, to whoſe

whoſe favor they owed much of their ſpiritual, and all their temporal grandeur.

SECTION XXXVII.

THUS the cauſe of the emperors ſtood, whilſt that of the popes was founded on nothing better than aſſumption, forgery, and the moſt barefaced uſurpation. They aſſumed, and their advocates aſſume ſtill, that CHRIST eſtabliſhed a kingdom when he was on earth. They call it his church, and play with the ambiguity of the word; for when they mean to ſpeak of the ſuppoſed actual kingdom of CHRIST on earth, the word church ſignifies the whole body of chriſtian people; and when they mean to ſpeak of the governors or government of this ſuppoſed kingdom, the ſame word is uſed to ſignify the whole eccleſiaſtical order, with the pope at the head of it. To ſay in plain terms that CHRIST eſtabliſhed a religion, a rule of faith and manners, the conformity or nonconformity to which is to be rewarded or puniſhed by CHRIST himſelf in another life, and that he commiſſioned certain men to preach it, and to commiſſion others to preach it, would not lay a foundation ſufficient for the immenſe building that has been erected, and is ſtill kept up, tho it has tottered long. They were glad at firſt to found their primacy on an imperial reſcript. But they ſoon aſſumed that CHRIST inſtituted a ſovereign pontiff to govern this church or kingdom, that this pontiff was PETER the prince of his apoſtles, and that he did this agreeably to all laws divine and human; nay that he would not have ſhewn common diſcretion, if he had neglected to leave ſuch a vicar behind him as might execute all his own powers. They aſſume that the popes are the ſucceſſors of PETER, that they have all his powers as he

had CHRIST's, and are, as he was, the vicars of CHRIST *. They aſſume a multitude of other things, relative to theſe, which it is unneceſſary I ſhould ſtay to enumerate. Now of theſe aſſumptions, which are the principal every man is a competent judge who can read the goſpels; for we muſt own that no powers like thoſe which are aſſumed can belong to the church now, nor could belong to the apoſtles themſelves, unleſs they are evidently contained therein: or elſe we muſt beg the queſtion moſt abſurdly, as our proteſtant writers, and the leaſt papal of yours, ſuch as DU PIN and GIANNONE, that I may quote a lawyer as well as a divine, have done. They ſuppoſed that CHRIST eſtabliſhed a ſociety diſtinct from the civil, in every ſociety where his religion ſhould be received, by the commiſſion given to his apoſtles and diſciples. Let us ſuppoſe this to be true, for the ſake of argument. Let us ſuppoſe, in conſequence of it, that this ſociety had a power to make laws for it's own advantage and better government, provided theſe laws did not diſturb the eſtabliſhed order of the ſtate, as every other particular and lawful ſociety has by common right according to them, but not according to truth in ſo great a latitude. When all this is yielded to them, all that will follow is, that ſuch a ſociety had a power of making by-laws to which all the members of it, that is, all eccleſiaſtics, were ſubject, and they alone. I ſay eccleſiaſtics alone, that the church ſophiſts may not impoſe on us by an equivocal uſe of terms, nor employ the word church in one ſenſe, in one part of their argumentation, and in another ſenſe, in another. If they ſay, and they do ſay, that the legiſlative power ſpoken of was given to

* Quod divino et humano jure ita ſemper factum reperiretur, CHRISTUM ſuorum apoſtolorum principem conſtituiſſe PETRUM. This is cited by CASAUBON in his fifth exercit. on BARONIUS. Omnis poteſtas mihi data eſt in coelo et in terrâ. MAT. xxviii. 18. This is the text. The papal commentary follows. Non videretur dominus diſcretus fuiſſe, ut cum reverentia ejus loquar, niſi unicum poſt ſe talem vicarium reliquiſſet, qui haec omnia poſſet. Vid. aut. gloſſar. in extrav. unam ſanctam.

the

the religious ſociety, excluſively of the civil, their argument drawn from the rights of particular ſocieties is good, as far as their ſociety is concerned. But if they ſay, and they do ſay, that the civil ſociety of Chriſtians was and is ſubject to theſe laws, they beg the queſtion, and they grow abſurd. The compariſon is no longer juſt, nor the argument good; for tho it be granted, that the by-laws of a particular ſociety may govern that ſociety, it is denied, that they can be laws to the whole community. Laws to the whole community, no power that is not the ſovereign power in that community can preſcribe. I know that the trite diſtinction between ſpiritual and temporal is always at hand. But I aſk, is this power co-ercive or not? If it be not ſo, a power which begins and ends in ſpirituality cannot be very dangerous nor oppreſſive. But if it be co-ercive, they may call it ſpiritual as long as they pleaſe; it is what I juſt now ſaid, the power of a particular ſociety to make laws, not for themſelves alone, but for the whole community; and as much as the church advocates endeavor to diſguiſe the abſurdity, and to evade the conſequences, this is what they mean.

If this was not their meaning, to what purpoſe ſhould they inſiſt ſo much, or at all indeed, on the great ſuperiority of the clergy as a more holy order over the laity, and of ſpiritual power and dignity over the temporal? This they have all done from Cyprian, firſt a magician, and afterwards a father of the chriſtian church, down to that learned bigot Dodwell, who wrote diſſertations on him. This they do even in this country, and at this hour, as openly as they dare; for let us not be deceived by the low cunning and diſſimulation of ſome. Whoever aſſerts that the eccleſiaſtical order is of divine inſtitution, and by that inſtitution independent of the ſtate, whatever alliance this order may think fit to ſuppoſe has been made with it, ſays in effect all that

that they ſay who ſpeak more openly, more honeſtly, and more conſiſtently. GIANNONE, who writ at Naples, carries theſe notions ſo far, that he lies open to ridicule in this particular, how reſpectable an author ſoever he be in general. He quotes CICERO to ſhew that, in the roman commonwealth, they who preſided over the affairs of the ſtate preſided over thoſe of religion, by a cuſtom derived from their foreſathers; and that nothing is more worthy of princes and men, diſtinguiſhed by their knowledge in human affairs, than to be ſo likewiſe by their knowledge of thoſe that are divine. He ſays that the two characters of king and prieſt were united often in heathen governments. But that the chriſtian religion propoſing a much more noble object than the meer proſperity of ſtates and the public tranquility, the dignity of the prieſthood among Chriſtians is ſeparated from the imperial dignity, and raiſed as much above it as things divine are above things human, as the ſoul is more noble than the body, and as eternal happineſs is preferable to that of this life. He tells us afterwards, that notwithſtanding this wide difference, the two characters may be united in the ſame perſon, by an acceſſion of the temporal to the ſpiritual dignity, not by any acceſſion of the ſpiritual to the temporal. The reaſon he gives is, becauſe eccleſiaſtical dignity, being the greateſt, cannot become an acceſſion to or a dependence on the leaſt; whereas the leaſt may be in that relation to the greateſt: and thus you ſee that a prieſt may ſtoop to the exerciſe of regal power, but a king cannot be raiſed up to the exerciſe of eccleſiaſtical, no, not to that of a country curate.

IF a man, of as much knowledge and as little bigottry as this hiſtorian, could publiſh to the world, for I do not think he believed, ſuch extravagances, in the eighteenth century, we cannot be ſurpriſed that theſe, and greater than theſe were taught, and piouſly believed too, in the ages of ignorance and ſuperſtition.

tion. But if the primitive clergy maintained ſuch notions in ſpeculation, they could not maintain them in practice. They had been ſheep among wolves before CONSTANTINE. They were ſheep, under the conduct of ſhepherds, after him: and theſe ſhepherds or principal paſtors were the emperors. They became in proceſs of time wolves among ſheep: and emperors themſelves were often the ſheep they preyed upon. It is not only true that the emperors meddled very far in matters of religion, in matters of doctrine, I ſay, as well as of diſcipline; it is not only true that councils were ſummoned by their authority; but it is true likewiſe that the clergy had recourſe to the ſame authority, to confirm their canons, and to give them the force of laws. The nicaean canons were confirmed by CONSTANTINE; thoſe of Conſtantinople by THEODOSIUS; thoſe of the council of Chalcedonia by MARCIANUS: and we need go no farther than the theodoſian code, tho we might do ſo, to prove that the by-laws of the religious ſociety acquired the force of laws, even in points of diſcipline that concerned this ſociety alone, by the imperial, not the eccleſiaſtical authority, and by being inſerted among the imperial conſtitutions. So that not only the ratification of the emperors was neceſſary to the doctrines they taught; but the by-laws they made, for the government of their own ſociety, were ſubject to the civil power.

IT would not be hard to ſhew, by a multitude of examples, that the church had no more claim allowed in thoſe days to judicial and executive power, nor to the immunities and privileges ſhe enjoyed, than ſhe had to legiſlative power; that is, no more than the emperors allowed her: unleſs we ſhould call the power of excommunication, which I ſuppoſe biſhops exerciſed both before and after CONSTANTINE with the advice and conſent of their preſbyters alone, wherever they durſt, a part of executive co-ercive power. But if this may be called executive,

executive, it cannot be called co-ercive. It was a cenſure, it was an excluſion from chriſtian congregations; but this cenſure, and this excluſion, operated on the imagination alone: and, the puniſhment being imaginary, the power was ſo too. It was nothing more till the increaſe of eccleſiaſtical, and the concurrence of civil authority made it more. In ſhort, the power and dignity of the religious ſociety were much higher in ſpeculation and pretenſion, than they were in practice and reality, even for ſome time after the reign of CHARLEMAGNE, as high as this emperor raiſed them. The prelates in general, and the biſhops of Rome in particular, before his time, and in it, made a ſhew of the greateſt meekneſs, and of the greateſt humility and ſubmiſſion to the emperors; tho they were even then in purſuit of the greateſt objects of ambition. The ſucceſſors of that wicked ſaint, GREGORY, continued to take, like him, the title of ſervants of the ſervants of God, at the very time when they ſacrificed all the ſentiments of humanity to the pride of being called oecumenical biſhops; at the very time when they meditated, nay when they attempted, to be maſters of the maſters of the world. By this hypocritical behavior, and by that ſilly diſtinction between ſpiritual and temporal power, government of the church, and government of the ſtate, they hindered men from taking an alarm that ſhould have been taken ſooner, and their tyranny was eſtabliſhed almoſt before it was perceived.

WHEN the roman biſhops pulled off their maſk, and began to contend openly for power with the emperors, the eccleſiaſtical maxims which had been aſſumed for evangelical truths, and the whole tendency of which had not been diſcerned, became of infinite ſervice to them. Theſe paradoxes could not be proved. But they had been admitted; and the papal pretenſions might be proved, plauſibly enough, to be the neceſſa-

ry

ry conſequences of them. Thus it happens often: a few falſe principles, uncautiouſly received, eſtabliſh whole ſyſtems of error, and abſurdity becomes capable of demonſtration. But falſe ſpeculative notions were not employed alone in the cauſe of the papacy. Falſe facts and falſe records were neceſſary; and therefore forgery was added to aſſumption *. Forgery is an hard word, but it muſt be uſed when truth exacts that it ſhould. I ſay then, that as it had been employed for holy purpoſes in the early ages of chriſtianity, it was employed, in thoſe we ſpeak of here, for purpoſes very unholy. No man dares deny the firſt: and the advocates of Rome themſelves, BARONIUS and others, are obliged to confeſs the laſt. Fathers were oppoſed to fathers, and councils to councils, about canonical writings; traditions of the weſtern to traditions of the eaſtern churches; and thoſe that were moſt diſtant in time and place, to thoſe that were neareſt in both to the ſource of theſe very traditions. Add to all this the approved cuſtom of ſpeaking and writing agoniſtically, or with oeconomy, that is, the cuſtom of ſaying one thing and meaning another; which St. JEROM, that great critic and voucher of canonical ſcriptures, avowed, practiſed, and recommended: add this conſideration, I ſay, to the reſt, and you will not be ſurpriſed to hear it advanced, that we know neither why the goſpels, the epiſtles, and the apocalypſe we have, were retained, or rather inſerted in the canon; nor why thoſe we have not were rejected. We are forced to be in this caſe abſolutely implicit: and yet in

* N. B. LESLIE, who was in religion as much a bigot, as in politics, makes a member of the church of England aſſert in a ſuppoſed dialogue between him and a roman catholic, that there were falſe goſpels and falſe epiſtles aſcribed to ſeveral of the apoſtles, ſet up by heretics in the firſt age; that they were detected in that ſame age, whilſt the originals of what the apoſtles wrote were ſtill in being; but that the heretics could not produce the originals of theirs, nor did their copies agree one with another. For all this he quotes EUSEBIUS, and adds, this was not deciding the matter by authority, but by plain evidence of a fact, as of any other forgery, or ſuppoſititious writing.

this caſe, if in any, we ought to have proof, that councils proceeded with integrity; ſince there is ſo great reaſon to ſuſpect, that the ſpirit of party had as much to do in determining what books ſhould be deemed canonical, as what doctrines ſhould be deemed orthodox.

But in the other caſe, we are not obliged to be ſo implicit. If all the canons of antient councils, and every other eccleſiaſtical monument, had remained in the hands of the popes alone, we may aſſure ourſelves, that they would have been all corrupted and interpolated, as ſuch writings are more than any others expoſed to be, and that thoſe which could not be made to ſpeak the language of the roman court would have been ſuppreſſed. Happily this ſuppreſſion was not practicable in a full extent, many of theſe antient records having been preſerved in other churches; and it is by the help of them that ſo many forgeries have been detected ſince the reſurrection of letters. Some had been detected near a thouſand years ſooner occaſionally, when the popes began firſt and faintly to ſtretch their primacy into a ſupremacy; a flagrant inſtance of which is the pretenſion, that was ſet on foot by one of them early in the fifth century, to a juriſdiction over the churches of Africa. This pretenſion was founded on a forged canon of the nicaean council. I ſay forged, becauſe when the African biſhops, and among them St. Austin, had procured an authentic copy of theſe canons from the Eaſt, no ſuch canon appeared among them. Other inſtances of occaſional forgery there are; but we may ſay, without exaggeration, that, from the ſeventh century at the lateſt downwards, Rome was a ſtorehouſe of falſe traditions, falſe records, and every kind of forgery that could be of uſe to eſtabliſh the eccleſiaſtical ſupremacy of her biſhops firſt; and when that was done, their ſuperiority of dignity and juriſdiction over all the other powers of the earth. This fund

increaſed

increaſed continually too, from the ſixth or ſeventh centuries. The more, and the more important the uſurpations of this church were, the more ſuch materials as theſe were wanted: and accordingly we find the times of the great increaſe, and the great want of them, coincide. The firſt decretals were forged, moſt probably, in the ſeventh century: and tho there has been much diſpute, whether the apoſtolical conſtitutions were made by the apoſtles, or by their immediate diſciples, as if it were impoſſible they ſhould be of a later date, yet is it an opinion more probable than either, that they are really no older than the ſixth century.

WHAT has been ſaid in this eſſay may ſerve to ſhew, how little reſpect would be due to the canons of councils, if they were genuine. But how much reaſon have we to neglect and deſpiſe them, when we conſider by whom they were collected, and at what aeras theſe collections came into repute; when we add, to the little authority of the canons themſelves, the little credit that the men who collected them, and who corrected and publiſhed them, deſerve! DIONYSIUS, the little ſcythian abbot, made the firſt collection of them, at leaſt the firſt that came into general uſe, in the ſixth century and at Rome. After the eighth they were mingled up with decrees of popes, and conſtitutions of CHARLEMAGNE, the great inſtrument, as well as patron, of papal uſurpations. The benedictin monk, GRATIAN, made a new collection in the twelfth century, and ſtuffed it with texts of ſcripture, as well as opinions of fathers. Of the former we may ſay, properly enough, "non erat his "locus," and of the latter, that they do not deſerve even the name of "reſponſa prudentum." If he was, and I think he was, brother of the maſter of the ſentences, the two brothers eſtabliſhed the two moſt impertinent ſciences that ever puzzled the heads of men and diſturbed the peace of the world, canon

law and ſcholaſtic theology. I ſay nothing of the clementines, nor the extravagants. They were publiſhed when the tyranny of Rome was already confirmed, and are as little to my purpoſe to be mentioned as the decretals publiſhed by that madman BONIFACE the eighth.

SUCH was the origin of that ſyſtem of law which is called the canon law, and by the prevalence of which the biſhop of one city, and a few ſuburbicarian provinces, invaded and ſubjected to his authority the civil laws of every country, the laws of nations, and the laws of nature themſelves. Many of the decrees of popes, that the monkiſh collectors foiſted into this eccleſiaſtical code, had not been made, very probably, many of them had not been executed, very certainly, at the time, and on the occaſions pretended; and yet they all acquired, in proceſs of time, a ſuppoſed authenticity, and became precedents alike. Juſt ſo, by an inverſion of all the rules of good criticiſm and of common ſenſe, their other forgeries got into credit. The leaſt of theſe were falſe repreſentations of things true. By them vain ceremonies, which the popes were admitted to perform, and vain compliments, which emperors and princes paid them, came in after-ages to paſs for acknowledgments of a right, and preſents that were made them, nay bribes that were given them, for tribute. The greateſt were thoſe groſs lies, and all thoſe fabulous relations which they invented, and propagated, to nouriſh ſuperſtition, or to juſtify uſurpation, which were not only void of all foundation, but often irreconcileable to hiſtory and chronology; and which, however, were repeated till they were believed, on the faith of fabulous legends. Thus they builded up a ſovereignty, at all times the moſt abſurd, and for a long time the moſt tyrannical, that had ever been felt over the weſtern world. An uniform ſyſtem of ambition ſteadily and artfully purſued, from one generation

neration to another, through ages of ignorance and ſuperſtition, wherein it was eaſy to impoſe on the underſtandings of men, and to direct their conſciences, eſtabliſhed this tyranny little by little. It grew up faſteſt from the time it was eſtabliſhed in the out-ſkirts of the empire, in Britain, and in Spain for inſtance. It grew up leſs in France, and it was reverenced leaſt of all at Rome. The Romans were pleaſed to ſee their city become the ſeat of chimerical, when it was ſo no longer of real empire. But then they uſed their pontiffs, as they had ſometimes uſed their emperors. They abetted their conqueſts abroad, and treated their perſons ignominiouſly at home. Theſe pontiffs were never more reſpected in foreign nations, than they were at the time when they gave the greateſt ſcandal, and received the greateſt inſults in Italy. By the means and by the conduct that have been mentioned, however, they were able, even in ſuch circumſtances, to aſſert with ſucceſs the moſt exorbitant of their pretenſions againſt the greateſt emperors.

This ſucceſs varied indeed on ſome particular occaſions; but on the whole, and in the event, it was in their favor. Thus, that I may quote two examples at leaſt, the firſt Otho depoſed John the thirteenth, in the tenth century, for debauchery and treaſon; directed and confirmed the election of Leo the eighth; reſtored this pope when he had been expelled from his ſeat by a rival; choſe another, and re-eſtabliſhed the imperial right to grant inveſtitures, and to nominate the biſhops of Rome, which prerogatives had been loſt by the ſucceſſors of Charlemagne. Thus, on the other hand, Gregory the ſeventh, in the next century, taking up the conteſt about theſe very prerogatives, which was again on foot, carried it on with ſo much ſucceſs, that all circumſtances conſidered, by what he effected, and by what he put it in the power of his ſucceſſors to effect, he may be eſteemed a worſe man and a greater con-

conqueror than ALEXANDER or CAESAR. In this conteſt, he had the addreſs to gain to his ſide the mother and the aunt of the emperor HENRY the fourth, and to debauch, in every ſenſe of the word, perhaps, his couſin german the counteſs MATHILDA. At leaſt, the manner in which ſhe lived with this dirty monk, and which was not at all neceſſary to the ſupport of a cauſe, ſhe might and did affect to favor on a religious principle, juſtifies the accuſation ſufficiently. He made the Saxons revolt; he divided the empire; he excommunicated the emperor and all his adherents over and over: and when he was aſked, by what right he had preſumed to deprive this prince of his crown, and to abſolve the ſubjects of the empire from the allegiance they had ſworn to him? He anſwered, that he had done it conformably to cuſtoms and uſages of his predeceſſors *. Such cuſtoms and ſuch uſages, before HILDEBRAND, were entirely unknown to the moſt learned men in former ages, as well as in ours. But HILDEBRAND had precedents ready to alledge, and ſome ſuch are, I believe, mentioned in letters of his writing. How, indeed, ſhould he want them, when Rome was a ſtore-houſe of acts of papal power which were never executed, nor would have been ſuffered at the times when they pretended to have been executed, but were laid up to be produced on future occaſions? This inſtance may ſerve to prove, by the way, therefore, the truth of what is ſaid above; for whether the pope invented theſe fabulous relations himſelf, or whether his ſecretary furniſhed him with falſe documents, as I learn by a note of BAYLE it has been ſuppoſed in his excuſe, theſe lies were coined in the papal mint. To conclude, this emperor, who came, it is ſaid, victorious out of more than ſixty combats, and who had forced his enemy from Rome into an exile from which he never returned at Salerne, was depoſed, dethroned, and confined to the priſon where he died, by his ſon

* MAIM. decad. de l'empire.

HENRY

HENRY the fifth, whom PASCHAL the ſecond incouraged in his rebellion, and excited to this cruelty.

AFTER the death of HENRY the fourth, the popes completed their uſurpations very ſoon. As they robbed the emperors of the right to confirm their elections, they robbed the clergy and the people of the right to elect them; for it was decreed at Mantua, that the cardinals alone ſhould chooſe the popes. In a council held at Troyes, it was decreed, that inveſtitures to benefices belonged to the ſovereign pontiff alone; becauſe religion was polluted, ſaid theſe reverend fathers, when perſons dedicated to the ſervice of the heavenly and immortal King became ſubjects and vaſſals of an earthly and mortal prince. In a council held at Rheims, HENRY the fifth, who had taken up his father's quarrel with the popes, tho he had rebelled in the ſame quarrel againſt his father, was excommunicated: and theſe circumſtances, with others diſcernible enough in hiſtory, determined him to a compoſition. He gave up the right of inveſtitures; for he conſented to hold it by a grant from the pope, and not as an imperial prerogative. He conſented too, that this grant ſhould be reſtrained to him perſonally, and that the prerogative ſhould belong ſolely to the ſee of Rome after his deceaſe. The popes were now arrived at that height of power and independency which had been ſo long the object of their ambition. They have maintained themſelves in it, as they attained to it, by fomenting rebellions, aſſaſſinations, maſſacres, and by employing ſuperſtition to keep up, in every ſtate, a private conſcience favorable to the eccleſiaſtical, and dangerous to the civil authority. Such have been the conſequences of an alliance between the monarchy and the hierarchy; (for thoſe, who talk of an alliance between the religious and civil ſociety, deſerve only contempt, when they affirm, with fact and common ſenſe both againſt them) and I believe,

that

that from the days of CHARLES the great to the reformation, no inſtance can be brought of a conteſt between them, wherein the biſhops of Rome have not prevailed in the whole, or in ſome very eſſential points, by the wiſe maxim of obſerving conjunctures, and of puſhing their pretenſions to the utmoſt with violence and inſolence; or of reducing them to terms of real or ſeeming moderation. When conjunctures were favorable, they bullied and uſurped: when theſe were unfavorable, they whined; compoſed, if they could, and if they could not, ſubmitted. Had the civil powers of Europe ſeen their danger in time, and united againſt it, theſe things could not have happened, nor the chriſtian church have become a perpetual ſource of the greateſt evils to the chriſtian world. But the civil powers were divided, and the popes growing of more and more conſequence, as their dignity and authority increaſed, every ſide was glad to have them, and the ſide that bid moſt, or yielded moſt, was ſure to have them. France had raiſed and protected them: and France afforded a terrible example, even as lately as the ſixteenth century, of her own miſtaken policy in the ninth and following centuries.

NOTWITHSTANDING the great ſucceſs which the popes had, and the ſuperiority they acquired over all chriſtian princes by acquiring it over the emperors, the ſtruggle was hard; the event had been ſometimes doubtful, and it was not very certain that they would be able to maintain the rights they had already uſurped, or to keep the laity in conſtant awe by the thunder of excommunications. To make their work ſure, therefore, they judged it neceſſary to invent ſtill new expedients, and to improve every old one that had ſerved to exalt eccleſiaſtical power and dignity. They did more. They found means to divert the attention of mankind from Europe to Aſia, and to confirm inſenſibly the tyranny they had uſurped, by engaging the

the princes and ſtates of the Weſt to undertake romantic expeditions for extending it into the Eaſt. The epidemical madneſs of the croiſades, which ambition, ſuperſtition, and licentiouſneſs combined to nouriſh, laſted two hundred years: and if theſe unholy wars did not extend the dominion of the church, nor eſtabliſh the papal power in the countries where they were made, both the church and the popes found their account in them ſeveral ways, where they meaned much more to find it. The croiſades were conſpiracies of the religious againſt the civil ſociety of Europe. Theſe two ſocieties were nearly on a ballance of power. The croiſades turned it in favor of the former. MEZERAY thinks, that the uneaſy and dangerous ſituation of his affairs in Italy, determined URBAN the ſecond to come into France, when he held the council of Clermont there, and that the promoting of the firſt expedition againſt the Saracens was nothing more than a pretence he took. But he had no need of any ſuch pretence. He was a french man: and France, as MEZERAY himſelf ſays, was the ordinary refuge of the popes. Beſides, when he had reſolved to put in execution this unchriſtian project, he could not fail to ſee that there was no country then in Europe wherein this ſcene of farce, which was to produce ſo many ſcenes of tragedy, could be acted with ſo much advantage as in France. Italy and Germany were divided between him and the emperor. Spain was the theatre of one perpetual war againſt the Moors. Britain was ſuperſtitious enough, but Britain lay in a remote corner of the world: the norman invaſion was juſt over, and the new government ſcarce ſettled. France was liable to none of theſe objections: and the ſucceſs which his holineſs had there might ſurpaſs his expectations, as it ſurpaſſes almoſt the belief of poſterity. The enthuſiaſtical fury, for ſuch it was, infuſed at Clermont by the pope, and fomented by his emiſſaries every where elſe, became at once an epidemical diſtemper, and all Europe grew delirious. Princes aban-

doned their dominions, and private men their patrimonies, to the care and protection of the church. Beſides innumerable frauds that the clergy committed, the regulars eſpecially, to invade the poſſeſſions of the laity; the laity was obliged to ſell them on theſe occaſions, and the clergy was ready and able to buy. No wonder, therefore, ſince power always follows property, if the religious ſociety was ſtrengthened by being enriched; if the civil was weakened by being impoveriſhed, and if, upon the whole, the church gave the law to the ſtate.

MANY other expedients were employed, like ſo many underprops to ſupport the ſame ſyſtem. They were leſs obſerved as ſuch, becauſe they carried an appearance of religious auſterity and ſelf-denial, of edification not of acquiſition. Some of the men who furniſhed theſe expedients, and who made them effectual to the purpoſes of eccleſiaſtical ambition, were the bubbles and the victims of their own ſuperſtitious zeal. But fools have been always led, in matters of religion eſpecially, by deſigning knaves. Hermits had been ſummoned from their ſolitudes, on ſome occaſions, to ſupport a turbulent ſeditious biſhop; one example of which has been referred to above. How much more eaſy was it for that univerſal biſhop, the pope, when religious orders multiplied, as they did prodigiouſly in the ages we ſpeak of here, and when, whoever inſtituted, he confirmed them, to employ theſe ſtanding armies of monks more ſilently, but more effectually too, in his ſervice? The croiſades gave much occaſion to theſe inſtitutions; and the extravagance was carried ſo far that military orders were inſtituted among the reſt, that is, orders of men whoſe particular profeſſion obliged them to defend and propagate chriſtianity, as long as they lived, by cutting of throats. This indeed was the general profeſſion of all thoſe who took the badge of the croſs, whenever a pope thought fit, for the time at leaſt for which they engaged. I

ſay,

ſay, whenever a pope thought fit; becauſe this cruel expedient, which had been employed originally againſt the Mahometans, was employed afterwards againſt Chriſtians, againſt all ſuch as were called heretics, when every man was called by that name who did not, becauſe he could not, think as the church of Rome ordered him to think, or who exclaimed againſt the abominable corruptions of that court.

Among the expedients by which the religious ſociety was attached to the pope independently of their lawful ſovereigns, and to the church independently of the ſtate, that of a forced celibacy was one. They were a diſtinct order of men, and had a ſeparate intereſt from the other ſociety before. But by this inſtitution, every band that might have united, ſome of them at leaſt to it, was cut off, under the ſpecious pretence of a greater degree of chriſtian purity and perfection. Monks and nuns took a vow of chaſtity, wherein celibacy was included, according to the logic employed for this political purpoſe: and it was manifeſtly neceſſary to the ſame purpoſe, that the ſecular clergy ſhould be put under the ſame reſtraint. They were intended to mingle, more than the others, with civil ſociety. Their habitudes were much the ſame, and their intereſt not ſo ſeparate. There was, therefore, the more danger that they might contract a love for the civil conſtitution of their country, prefer their king to the pope, and reverence a parliament or aſſembly of the ſtates more than a council. All that could be done to prevent ſo great a miſchief was to hinder this attachment to their country from increaſing, by that natural attachment which fathers of families have to their children. This was ſeen early, and the biſhops of Rome had taken upon them, as far back as the ſeventh century, to forbid the marriages of prieſts. Their orders had been rejected by ſome, by the Spaniards particularly, and had been ill obeyed in general. But celibacy was now in-

joined more ſtrictly, and enforced more powerfully. Decrees of popes, canons of councils, all kinds of authority, were employed: and it muſt be confeſſed, to the honor of eccleſiaſtical policy, that the yoke impoſed was rendered as light as poſſible by connivance, and even by indulgence. The concubinage of prieſts was tolerated, nunneries became brothels, and if among the ſtanding expences of convents, a reaſonable allowance was not made to the monks for the neceſſary expences of fornication, "ad purgandos renes," and on a principle of health, which has been ſaid but may be denied; this at leaſt is notorious, that the fathers were left to provide for their health, in the beſt manner that they could, by ſimple fornication, or by adultery.

As this expedient attached the whole clergy, more intimately, to the general intereſt of the church, and to the particular intereſt of the pope, auricular confeſſion and private penance were deſigned to attach the people more intimately to the clergy *. Public confeſſions and public penance, as they had been practiſed in the primitive church, might impoſe more, and be a greater reſtraint on vice and immorality. But when it was thought ſufficient that all this paſſed privately between the confeſſors and the penitents, many advantages, which were deemed preferable to ſuch a reſtraint, reſulted from the modern practice. Penitents were exempted from public ſhame; if they bluſhed, they bluſhed in a corner: and confeſſors had the moſt ſecret tranſactions, nay the thoughts and deſigns, of mankind in their keeping. They had more: they had not only a general influence over private conſcience, but the means of exerciſing this influence in private; the means of teaching pri-

* N. B. Whatever private confeſſions, as well as others, might have been practiſed antiently, the law by which every perſon is obliged once in a year, I think, to confeſs all his ſins to his proper prieſt, was not made till INNOCENT the third got it enacted, among ſeveral that were calculated merely to advance the power and authority of the prieſthood, in the lateran council.

vately

vately what they dared not preach publicly, and of inſtilling into the minds of men every principle and paſſion they pleaſed. This expedient advanced the papal empire more than any: it made the biſhop of Rome, in ſome circumſtances, as terrible as the old man of the mountain, and inabled eccleſiaſtical ambition to do, more directly, more regularly, and more conſtantly than before, all the miſchief that has been imputed to religion. A very moderate knowledge of hiſtory, eccleſiaſtical and civil, antient and modern, will furniſh examples enow to confirm this truth. It is impoſſible to read without horror, for inſtance, the accounts we have of the ambition, inſolence, and perfidy of HADRIAN and ALEXANDER, in their diſputes with FREDERIC the firſt, whom HADRIAN, like the king of the aſſaſſins, endeavored to have drowned, ſtabbed, or deſtroyed by magic; and whom ALEXANDER, they ſay, inſulted, in the words of the pſalmiſt, "ſuper aſpidem et baſiliſcum "ambulabis." As little can we read, without the ſame ſentiment, the proceedings of GREGORY the ninth, a worthy ſucceſſor of the ſeventh, in the next century, that is the thirteenth, againſt the ſecond FREDERIC. But if all theſe hiſtories, and others of the ſame kind were wanting, and we had no other than that of THUANUS, that of THUANUS alone would ſerve the purpoſe, and the better for being nearer our own time. That wiſe and honeſt hiſtorian acknowledges, that all the iniquities of the league were hatched and nurſed up to maturity in the confeſſionals; after which, the effects of this private influence were publicly avowed, the ſovereignty of the popes over all other ſovereigns, in matters of religion, and in matters appertaining to religion, the infallibility of their judgments, their diſpenſing and depoſing power, the duty of rebellion in ſome caſes, and the merit of aſſaſſination in others, were propagated from the pulpits: and what their paſtors preached, the people executed.

It might be expected, perhaps, that the quarrels which aroſe after the reign of CHARLES the great, from a conflict of ſpiritual and temporal prerogatives and juriſdiction, as well as thoſe diſturbances which aroſe from diſſenting opinions about articles of faith, and points of doctrine, long before his time, would be appeaſed, and prevented for the future, by the eſtabliſhment of this papal monarchy. But, if ſuch an expectation was entertained, it was wholly diſappointed. The ſucceſſors of GREGORY the ſeventh took every opportunity of aſſerting their right to all the powers, temporal and ſpiritual, that he had claimed, and of exerciſing them as vicars of CHRIST. There is a decree of BONIFACE the eighth, who was leſs able, leſs ſucceſsful, and more mad, if poſſible, than HILDEBRAND, that holds it's place in the canon law, and that declares ſubjection to the roman pontiff neceſſary to the ſalvation of every human creature *. This ſubjection too is not confined to ſpirituals; for, in the extravagants, he claims a right to the two ſwords, and aſſerts a juriſdiction over all temporal, as well as ſpiritual authority †. This juriſdiction was confirmed by the council of Lateran, and was founded in the theology of thoſe doctors, who made a chriſtianity of their own, with little regard to that of CHRIST whoſe name it bore, and often in plain contradiction to his goſpel. Thus St. THOMAS, the evangelical doctor, as he has been called very improperly and very impertinently, pretended to prove, by ſhameful prevarications, that ſuch a ſubmiſſion as the popes required was an eſſential condition of ſalvation: and he, like the reſt of his tribe, and their maſters the popes, inflamed the diſſentions about articles of faith and doctrines, as much as about prerogatives and juriſdictions.

* Subeſſe romano pontifici.

† Regem ſe regum, mundi monarcham, unicum in ſpiritualibus et temporalibus dominum promulgavit.

To

To what purpoſe ſhould I quote any more inſtances, to ſhew that this has been the proceeding of the church of Rome, as I have aſſerted before, and as I aſſert now over again, from the eleventh and twelfth centuries! The fact is notorious. But yet this doctrine had never been acquieſced in univerſally. Sometimes kings, nay ſometimes councils, had oppoſed it: and the reformers, in the ſixteenth century, were ſo far from advancing any thing new on this head, that numbers of Chriſtians in the Weſt, as well as all the churches in the Eaſt, had conſtantly diſowned it during every intervening age, and that the former had ſuffered, rather than to own it, the moſt cruel perſecutions. Thus the ſame conflicts of juriſdiction were frequently renewed, and the ſame calamities continued by the ſame pertinacious ſpirit of ambition; till princes being tired with theſe ſtruggles, they came little by little, at different times and in different places, to certain terms of accommodation. Princes renewed with the popes their former alliances with the hierarchy, and compounded the beſt they could with the tyrant they had acknowledged. But notwithſtanding theſe compoſitions, and tho the popes dare not exerciſe their pretended rights as they did formerly, they keep up their pretenſions, in hopes that an happy revival of ignorance and barbarity may do them, ſooner or later, as much good as the unhappy reſurrection of letters did them hurt.

SECTION XXXVIII.

Such as I have ſketched them rudely, but truly, were the eccleſiaſtical and papal uſurpations on civil ſovereignty, complete almoſt before avowed, and oppoſed as ſoon as avowed. But the other uſurpations of Rome were different in their direction,

rection, and in their courſe. The intention of theſe being to veſt in the biſhop of that ſee the ſole right of deciding in matters of faith and doctrine, either immediately without, or ultimately with the concurrence of a council, and by way of confirmation, they were plainly directed againſt all the inferior ranks in the hierarchy: and thus, whilſt princes and ſtates defended their own rights by conſtant, tho unconcerted efforts, they left the pope at liberty to deal with his ſubjects, for ſuch the clergy, even the prelates had made themſelves, as he thought fit, and to proceed in his judgments with their advice, or without it. The conſequence ſoon followed; the laity believed as the church taught, and the church taught as the pope pronounced. But we muſt not imagine, that this uſurpation on a prerogative the church had always exerciſed by her repreſentative aſſemblies, convened without the papal authority, and acting independently on it, was admitted, becauſe either the religious or the civil ſociety thought it belonged to the pope by divine right; or becauſe the former being unable to reſiſt it without the abatement and aid of the latter, the latter neglected it as unconcerned in it. Neither of theſe ſocieties could believe, that this prerogative belonged to the pope by divine right, which the greateſt authorities and the recent practice of the whole eccleſiaſtical order contradicted: and if we conſider the paſſages of preceding ages, we ſhall find reaſon to believe, that princes and civil magiſtrates did not ſuffer this uſurpation to take place, becauſe they neglected it, or thought themſelves unconcerned in it, but becauſe they deſired, that it might take place. What is here ſaid deſerves to be explained: and when it is ſo, tho it be ſimply my conjecture, I think it will juſtify itſelf.

From the time there had been ſuch a thing as chriſtianity in the world, Chriſtians had been divided not only about compli-

ments,

ments, rites and ceremonies, "ſuch ſilly things, ſays HOOKER, "that very eaſineſs doth make them hard to be diſputed about "in ſerious manner *," but about every important article of their religion; and as ſoon as they had power in their hands, they perſecuted one another, and diſturbed the peace of the empire. To remedy this evil, councils were employed: but councils defined and decreed to little purpoſe. To ſupport their deciſions, the authority of the emperors was employed. Some of theſe, like THEODOSIUS, made the moſt ſanguinary laws, and exerciſed the moſt cruel tyranny, in the cauſe of orthodoxy. Others of them ſeemed to have ſo much concern for the church, that they had none for the empire; like HONORIUS, who was extremely buſy at Ravenna in puniſhing manicheans, donatiſts, priſcillianiſts, and heretics of every denomination, whilſt the Goths marched without oppoſition to Rome. All this, however, proved ineffectual, and new heads ſprouted out from the hydra of theology, as faſt as the ſpiritual and temporal ſwords lopped them off. It could not be otherwiſe. The ſcriptures are a ſure criterion of orthodoxy, when they are applied no farther than they were deſigned to be ſuch: and they could be deſigned to be ſuch no farther than they are intelligible and plain. He who pretends to employ this rule any farther, profanes the ſcriptures, and abuſes himſelf or others. This criterion, conſidered under the image of a rule, may be ſaid to mark out to us the great points, the inches, and the feet, for inſtance. But the leſs dimenſions, the lines, for inſtance, are not marked, or they are not diſcernible. The maſter builder, who put this rule into our hands, that we might work out our ſalvation by it, proportioned the rule to the work. How came we then, paultry builders that we are! to mark new and more minute diviſions on this rule; to alter it, under pretence of making it more complete, and to meaſure

* Ep. dedicat.

and to build by gueſs? The goſpel is the rule: theology is the rule, thus altered. He who adheres to one, founds his religion on divine, he who adheres to the other, on human authority; the firſt infallible and fixed, the ſecond precarious and variable.

METAPHYSICS and tradition, their own whimſies and thoſe of their predeceſſors, guided the clergy, and conſtituted their theology. They never conſidered the word of God naked, if I may ſay ſo, nor ever looked at it, except through a theological medium, through which every man might ſee whatever he had a mind to ſee in it. Many of the queſtions that aroſe, were, in no degree, objects of reaſon: and no men living were leſs fit than the fathers of the church, the greateſt of them, St. CHRYSOSTOM or St. JEROM, and St. AMBROSE or St. AUSTIN, to ſpeak or write on any ſubject, that required a clear determination of ideas, a cloſeneſs of reaſoning, an evangelical candor, or even common ingenuouſneſs. Beſides, that it was difficult very often to know whether theſe men ſpoke ſincerely, or with oeconomy, they declaimed much: and thoſe of them, who pretended to reaſon, reaſoned ill. They perverted the ſenſe, and defamed the characters of their adverſaries: they quibbled and cavilled, and then decided dogmatically on ſubjects they did not underſtand; as St. AUSTIN did, I preſume, in the caſe of pelagianiſm, and in the doctrine of abſolute predeſtination, which he, after St. PAUL, and CALVIN after him, endeavored to eſtabliſh. Their perſonal partialities, the ſpirit of party and faction were manifeſt; as in the caſe of ORIGEN, who did great honor and ſervice to the chriſtian church, and yet was condemned by the ſame prelate that ordained SYNESIUS biſhop of Ptolemais, tho the honeſt philoſopher declined this honor, and declared he would neither abandon his wife, nor ſeveral of thoſe platonic opinions, that were repugnant to the chriſtian doctrine. There are ſo many examples to juſtify this charge, in

in every part of it, that if any choleric divine ſhould preſume to deny it, the ſame fate might attend him and the fathers he took under his protection, as attended them and the monk who defended them againſt BARBEYRAC. The charge might be proved out of their own works, and their theology ſhewn to be no better than their ethics.

I HAVE touched over again, among others, ſome things that have been mentioned already, in order to introduce my conjecture about the reaſon that might determine the civil powers to make no oppoſition to the popes when they aſſumed firſt an abſolute authority, even ſuperior to that of councils, in matters of faith, and in all matters of doctrine and diſcipline. Their reaſon muſt have been political. It could not be religious. The manner of holding the firſt council at Jeruſalem, and the manner of decreeing in it, as they are repreſented in the fifteenth of the Acts, made ſtrongly for the councils, and not at all for the popes. This was certainly the firſt council, a precedent for all others, and the foundation of their authority over the whole church. No man, I believe, before BARONIUS, had diſcovered, that CHRIST himſelf held a council, and that he preſided in it when he called his diſciples to him and aſked them firſt, as one who enquired about news, whom men ſaid that he was; and next as a preſident who took their opinions whom they ſaid that he was *. But this little ſophiſtry was meaned to inſinuate, that as CHRIST gave the keys on this occaſion to PETER and his ſucceſſors, ſo he gave them particularly a ſuperiority over councils, nay, that he rendered theſe the leaſt uſeful aſſemblies in the world. PETER alone pronounced the decree of this type of a council †; and tho the others aſſented, no doubt, yet does it not appear that the form of conſulting them was obſerved.

* Matt. xvi. Mark viii. Luke ix.

† Actio Chriſti typum quendam exprimit celebrandi concilium.

The practice of the church afforded no more reaſon, than the terms of the goſpel, for this ſuperiority of the popes over councils; but the woeful experience of many ages ſhewed how inadequate the inſtitution of councils themſelves was to the purpoſe of preſerving uniformity in chriſtian churches, and peace in chriſtian ſtates: and this political conſideration became a ſufficient reaſon to the civil powers for favoring, or at leaſt for not oppoſing the uſurpation of the popes, in the inſtance we ſpeak of here.

It had been found neceſſary, even in the apoſtolical age, to elect a preſbyter in every church, who might preſerve the unity of it by his authority, and prevent the ſchiſms which aroſe perpetually. This was the inſtitution of biſhops. As chriſtianity ſpread, as biſhops multiplied, as they grew more powerful, and as theology grew more and more contentious, the ſame expedient, that had been found uſeful, if not wholly effectual, to preſerve the uniformity of particular churches, might ſeem the moſt proper to be employed for the ſame purpoſes in the univerſal church: and in this caſe who ſo fit to be the univerſal biſhop as the biſhop of Rome? Rome had been the ſeat of empire, when the empire had been in it's glory. If the dignity of cities was to determine, as it had always done, the dignity of ſees, there was none that could vie with that of Rome. If a right derived from St. Peter, the ſuppoſed prince of the apoſtles, was to determine, there was none neither, in this caſe, to vie with that of Rome. Antioch, the firſt biſhopric of Peter, had yielded to the ſecond imperial city, Conſtantinople. Who could vie then with the biſhop of the firſt imperial city, that pretended, and was believed to have been the ſecond biſhopric of Peter, as well as the ſcene of his martyrdom?

It is true, that ſome biſhops of Rome had erred moſt grievouſly in their judgments, and been ſcandalous in their manners. But others had retrieved, in ſome degree, the honor of the ſee: and if the hereſies and vices of popes were made objections againſt them, in this caſe, what church was there that could boaſt an uninterrupted ſucceſſion of orthodox and pious prelates? In ſhort, all the churches of the Weſt had contracted, in proceſs of time, ſuch an habitual reverence for that of Rome, that her opinions in matters of religion and conſcience had been frequently aſked, and that the judgments of her biſhops had been received with an apparent ſubmiſſion, even by thoſe who did not acknowledge, till long afterwards, a power to impoſe them. The churches of Spain and of Gaul afford a moſt remarkable inſtance to our preſent purpoſe, in the famous caſe of the proceſſion of the holy ghoſt. Both of them paid a great regard to the papal authority in matters of this kind: the latter, I think, moſt and ſooneſt; tho the former has outſtripped her ſince in a bigot attachment to it: and yet both theſe churches had added the words "filioque," in order to declare their belief, that the holy ghoſt proceeded from the ſon as well as the father, to the conſtantinopolitan creed, not only without, but againſt the conſent of the popes. This addition too was not only maintained three hundred years together, but impoſed, at laſt, on the church of Rome; one of her infallible biſhops having admitted it into his creed very wiſely, and choſen to authoriſe, what he could not alter, rather than ſuffer ſo great a part of the weſtern church to ſtand in oppoſition to his infallibility, at the very time when the eſtabliſhment of it was attempted.

After this time the clergy grew more obſequious to the popes, and more inſolent to their princes; for as the power

of

of the former increaſed, their independency on the latter increaſed with it. If it had not been ſo, we ſhould have heard of more oppoſitions to the doctrines of Rome, and thoſe we do hear of would have prevailed ſooner. But as the civil power deſired nothing more than an uniformity of belief for the ſake of peace, and thought that this uniformity could be preſerved no way ſo well as by giving to one biſhop a ſuperintendency over the faith of the whole church, two things followed of courſe. One we know. The other we may conjecture from what we know. We know, that civil and eccleſiaſtical power united their efforts to exterminate, by inquiſitions, by croiſades, and all the cruelties they were able to exerciſe, every ſect that aroſe in direct and open oppoſition to the doctrines and deciſions of the church of Rome. We conjecture, that in caſes where the oppoſition was more confined, and more diſguiſed, where it ſeemed directed to diminiſh, rather than to aboliſh the authority of the popes, the ſame thing happened formerly in many places, which we ſee happen in France at this day. A great number of the inferior clergy, few of the prelates, refuſed to accept the conſtitution unigenitus. The former have been diſcountenanced and oppreſſed without much noiſe; and thoſe of them that perſiſt, perſiſt in ſilence and obſcurity. The others die off, and are replaced by men more complaiſant and more politic. Thus the oppoſition to this bull will make no figure in hiſtory, and the doctrine of it will paſs for that of the whole gallican church conforming implicitly to a papal conſtitution. The pretended explanations, reſtrictions, and other prevarications, that were employed to trim between God and the pope, will remain in the pamphlets of the time alone, and in the cloſets of antiquaries. Thus an appearance of uniformity in matters of faith has been, and may be impoſed on poſterity, by ſtifling the proofs of the contrary: and if this failed, the church would have nothing more to do to preſerve

ſerve the illuſion of uniformity, than what ſhe has done ſo often and ſo long; to quote thoſe alone who have ſpoken the ſame language as ſhe ſpeaks, and to take no notice of others, or to paſs them by as heretics whoſe ſuffrage ought not to be brought to account.

THE pope is a general; the clergy a ſtanding army, which has fought his battles, like other armies, without any regard to the juſtice or injuſtice of the cauſe: and the common ſoldiers of which, as of other armies, have ſometimes mutinied in particular quarters, the general officers ſeldom, the whole or the greateſt part never. That even the common ſoldiers of this army ſhould mutiny, at any time, may appear the more extraordinary, becauſe no general ever recompenſed the zeal of private men in his cauſe more ſignally than the pope has done. He procured them free quarters and very lucrative exemptions in every chriſtian country. He abetted their inſolence, and employed every artifice, as well as his whole power, to impoſe on the ſuperſtition of mankind an high conceit of the dignity of this ſpiritual militia. One artifice of this ſort, the moſt extravagant that was ever invented, and the moſt effectual at the ſame time, ſhall be produced. You may be ſurpriſed, perhaps, when I ſay it was the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation.

SECTION XXXIX.

NOTHING could be more intelligible, nor even to human judgment more reaſonable, than the inſtitution of the Lord's ſupper; ſince the ſole deſign of it was that Chriſtians ſhould commemorate in common the death of CHRIST and the redemption of mankind, as well as ſignify, by participating of the ſame bread and the ſame wine, that they were of the ſame religion,

religion, if, as ERASMUS ſays in paraphraſing St. PAUL, " vide-
" tur agnoſcere communem religionem qui communibus cibis
" veſcitur *. But refinements, and figurative expreſſions employ-
ed about it, made the plaineſt thing in the world myſtical and
unintelligible. The effects of the euchariſt were made ſo firſt,
and the very elements, the bread and the wine, became ſo af-
terwards. This ſacrament was no longer a ſimple act of com-
memoration and of profeſſion. It was made a great and dread-
ful myſtery, of which Chriſtians may partake to their damna-
tion, as well as to their ſalvation. The perſon, by whom it
was inſtituted, is repreſented ſometimes under images that ren-
der it impoſſible to frame any of the efficacy, or even of the
inſtitution of this ſacrament. CHRIST is a vine, he is a rock,
nay he is a coat, according to St. PAUL; and we clothe our-
ſelves with him in our baptiſm, according to St. CHRYSOSTOM.
According to the ſame eloquent father too, he ſtands to us in
the relation of an head, of an houſe, of a table, and of a
root †. Now one of theſe images alone can give us any im-
perfect idea of the efficacy of this ſacrament. CHRIST is the
head of a body, and the faithful are the members. The ſame
loaf is made up of many crumbs, the ſame body of many
members §: and therefore, according to St. PAUL's reaſoning,
all thoſe who eat of one loaf compoſe one body ‖. Thus
CHRIST is, in this community, at once the ſon of God and the
brother of man. The brother, but the elder brother, of the
elect **: and in the epiſtle to the Epheſians we are ſaid to be
fleſh of his fleſh, and bone of his bone, " ex carne ejus et oſ-

* Paraph. in ep. ad Cor. ep. 1. c. x. v. 15.

† —— CHRISTUM ſuis eſſe non ſolum caput, domum, menſem, radicem, ſed etiam veſtem quando in baptiſmo CHRISTUS induatur. vid. CASAUB. in exercit.

§ Panis ex innumeris granis ſic conflatus eſt —— corpus ſic ex diverſis membris conſtat —— Paraph. ERAS.

‖ Quoniam unus panis, unum corpus multi ſumus, omnes qui de uno pane participamus. Ep. ad Corin. 1. c. x.

** Primogenitus in multis fratribus, ep. ad Rom. viii. 29.

" ſibus

" ſibus ejus." Theſe immenſe and inexplicable advantages are to be aſcribed, principally, to the efficacy of this myſterious ſacrament. By baptiſm, we are made partakers of the holy ghoſt. By this ſacrament, we are made ſuch of the body and blood of CHRIST. But I will conclude, inſtead of citing any more particular inſtances, by borrowing from CASAUBON ſome general words, that may ſerve to ſhew how high mens notions have been raiſed about this theological myſtery, by the theological abuſe of figures. " The euchariſty, rightly taken, " is the inſtrument of that conjunction by which we grow into " one body with the ſon of God, and with all the faithful ---- " What can be more admirable, what more ſtupendous, than " that man ſhould be thus joined and coalited with God, the " creature with the Creator, the mortal with the immortal, " the finite with the infinite, and earth with heaven? This " miracle is greater than that of creating a world out of no- " thing *." I think it is; but I think too, that it would be as eaſy to diſtinguiſh the moſt extravagant language that platonic or pythagorean enthuſiaſts ever held out of blaſphemy, as theſe orthodox expreſſions.

THE yoke of chriſtianity is eaſy, and the burden light. But if theology has ſhortened the decalogue, it has lengthened the creed, and has maintained hitherto in the inlightened ages ſuch a tyranny over the minds of men, in oppoſition to reaſon and revelation too, as could not be eſtabliſhed in the darkeſt without much difficulty. In the caſe juſt mentioned, concerning the myſtical effects of the euchariſty, we are required by hu-

* ——Euchariſtiam legitimo modo ſumptam inſtrumentum eſſe ejus conjunctionis, perquam in corpus unum cum filio Dei——coaleſcimus, et cum caeteris etiam omnibus fidelibus——quid magis admirabile aut magis ſtupendum, quàm jungi, atque adeo coaleſcere in corpus unum, hominem cum Deo, creaturam cum Creatore, mortalem cum immortali, finitum cum infinito, coenum cum coelo? Hoc majus eſt miraculum, quàm de nihilo mundum creaſſe.

man authority to believe, that the moſt divine and important truths are concealed under a variety of figurative expreſſions, which have no conceivable applications, at leaſt none that are conceivable to us uninſpired perſons, or elſe ſuch as cannot be made by us, without a profanation that ſhocks the ear of every man who keeps up in his mind an awful ſenſe of the majeſty of the Supreme Being; nor dares to think, like thoſe whom we call divines, as familiarly and as lowly of God as of man. In the caſe that is to be mentioned concerning the elements, as they are called, of the euchariſty, your church requires, and the whole chriſtian church did require before the reformation, that we ſhould believe ſubſtances which give us the ideas of bread and wine, both before and after conſecration, to be, after it, ſuch ſubſtances as give us the ideas of fleſh and blood. If we ſhould ſay, that in fact they give us theſe ideas, we ſhould lie moſt impudently: and if we ſhould ſay, as you pretended catholics do ſay, that, tho they give us ſtill the ideas of bread and wine, yet they are miraculouſly fleſh and blood, we ſhould talk a language that paſſes on millions, and yet can paſs on no one man who conſults his reaſon impartially, or who conſiders the proofs of chriſtian revelation by miracles, which are, in truth, appeals to the ſenſes.

We are all conſcious, or very little experiment and reflection will ſuffice to make us ſo, that we know nothing more of ſubſtances than their effects. God has given us no other way of diſtinguiſhing them: and if we abandon that, nothing can be affirmed or denied concerning them. A miracle may change one ſubſtance into another, as water was changed into wine at the feaſt in Galilee. But the accidents cannot remain, and the ſubſtance be changed; or to ſpeak more plainly, a different ſubſtance muſt produce different ideas in us. A ſupernatural operation muſt be ſenſible, or it is no more a miracle than if nothing

thing was operated. The guests at Cana would not have believed that the water was turned into wine, if they had not been convinced of the change by their taste: and if the disciples were convinced, after his resurrection, that JESUS was the same CHRIST who had been crucified, it was because they said that they saw him to be the same, and that one of them probed the wounds he had received on the cross. According to the first example then, the communicants in your church should eat raw flesh, and the priest by his peculiar privilege should drink warm blood; for the transubstantiation is instantaneous: and, according to the last example, if the elements in the eucharisty continue to the sight and taste the same, they are the same bread and the same wine, after consecration, that they were before.

HE who should think to evade the absurdity, by insisting that God works two miracles at once, that he changes the bread and wine into flesh and blood, and that to exercise our faith he alters the physical constitution of the elect in such a manner, on this occasion, that flesh and blood produce in them the ideas of bread and wine; he, I say, who should think so, would only increase the absurdity by endeavoring to evade it, as they who are in the dirt, dirty themselves more by endeavoring to get out of it. He would assume a miracle and no miracle, or rather a miracle contrived to disguise a miracle, and a fraudulent imposition on our senses for the excellent purpose of exercising faith against knowledge, and in direct contradiction to all the proofs that CHRIST gave of the divinity of his mission by appealing to the senses of mankind: so that if transubstantiation be true, the whole christian revelation may be false. No one would impute such a kind of proceeding to any man who was not a professed juggler: and yet such a proceeding is imputed to God, by popes, councils, and the whole tribe of your divines. But it is time I should leave a subject that gives me horror, even

when I write againſt it; and that has been exhauſted by abler pens, by that of TILLOTSON particularly, in a ſhort tract preferable to immenſe volumes. It is time I ſhould remember that my buſineſs here is not to refute the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, but to ſhew how it came to be eſtabliſhed, and the political view of the popes in the eſtabliſhment of it.

SECTION XL.

To this purpoſe then, I ſay, that a ſuppoſed myſtery in the elements aroſe firſt, like a ſuppoſed myſtery in the effects of the euchariſty, from figurative expreſſion. There is no one, perhaps, in the whole goſpel, leſs liable to an equivocal ſenſe than that which CHRIST imployed, when he ſaid, "this is my "body, and this is my blood," in the very act of giving bread and wine to his diſciples who were at ſupper with him, juſt before his death, for a remembrance of which this ceremony of a ſupper was then inſtituted by him. The figure was eaſy, the application natural, and they could not underſtand the expreſſion literally. It is impoſſible to ſuppoſe that they did, unleſs we ſuppoſe them mad: and yet it is this very expreſſion that has been made the foundation of a doctrine, which Hurons and Iroquois, Samojedes and Hottentots, would bluſh to own, and which has brought diſgrace on chriſtianity, if any ever did, as well as innumerable calamities on the chriſtian world. The fathers of the church loved figurative ſtyle, and their whole theology is nothing elſe, but they imployed it more to perplex than to explain: and it is not wonderful, therefore, if they ſeemed to confound the typical, or ſymbolical, with the real body of CHRIST. They ſeemed to do it, or they did it, if you will, ſometimes. But when their matter led them to ſpeak with more caution and preciſion, ſo many of them, and of the greateſt of them, contradiſtinguiſhed the firſt from the laſt, in

ſuch

ſuch plain and ſtrong terms, that it is evident a real corporeal preſence in the euchariſty was neither their opinion, nor the general belief of the church in the firſt ages. Give me leave to add, tho I cite no other particular paſſages here, becauſe they have been cited by many on the ſame occaſion, that the inconſiſtency of your church never appears to me more barefaced than it does, when I conſider that ſhe has made the writings of St. AUSTIN almoſt a rule of faith; and yet that this father not only declares, in many places, againſt her favorite doctrine, which was not at that time a doctrine *, but guards againſt it, for fear it ſhould become ſuch by a wrong interpretation of the ſcripture. He brings an example of wrong interpretations that may be made, by quoting theſe words, "except ye eat "the fleſh of the ſon of man, and drink his blood, ye have no "life in you." Theſe words interpreted literally contain, according to him, a great impiety. They are to be interpreted, therefore, figuratively. The doctrine of tranſubſtantiation is, therefore, an impious doctrine, according to this father.

BUT how carefully ſoever the typical and ſymbolical body of CHRIST in the euchariſty was diſtinguiſhed, on ſome occaſions, from his real body, from the body born of the virgin MARY, which was crucified, which roſe from the dead, and which aſcended into heaven, they grew to be eaſily confounded in the minds of men, by the continual uſe of the ſame figure without the ſame explanation of it, and the ſign paſſed for the thing ſignified among many. This has often happened; and it happened the more naturally in this caſe, becauſe the imaginations of men being heated with myſtery, the doctrine that was the moſt myſterious was the moſt likely to prevail. The doctrine, however, of CHRIST's corporeal preſence in the ſacrament would not have prevailed, even in the eighth century, very probably,

* De doct. chriſtiana l. 3.

ſo

ſo far as to be eſtabliſhed by the authority of a council, if it had not been found neceſſary to evade an argument, that the breakers of images urged, and to ſupport the ſtupid worſhip of them, as TILLOTSON obſerves. One ſynod, that of Conſtantinople, determined, that CHRIST had left an image of his body, the bread in the euchariſty, and therefore no other image of him ought to be made. Another ſynod, the ſecond nicaean, determined, about thirty years afterwards, that the bread and wine after conſecration were the body and blood, not the images of the body and blood of CHRIST; that he had, therefore, left no image of himſelf, and that other images of him might be worſhipped. Zeal for idolatry of one kind propagated idolatry of another: and to the worſhip of images, which the Chriſtians practiſed as well as the heathens, and which the heathens excuſed as well as the Chriſtians, the latter added ſomething too abſurd, and too abominable, to make a part of the religious rites of the former. They conjured their God into a wafer; they adored him in that wafer; they offered him up in a true ſacrifice to himſelf, and they eat him up, to conclude the ceremony. "Sit anima mea cum philoſophis, non "cum Chriſtianis, gente ſtolidiſſima, qui Deum faciunt et com-"edunt," a ſaying of AVERROËS, which no man needs to diſown.

ALL this was not eſtabliſhed, without great conteſt, nor ſoon. In the ninth and following centuries, it was much oppoſed. One of thoſe who oppoſed it, BERENGER, dean of Angers, and a man famous for learning and piety when there was little of either among the religious ſociety, had been frightened into a recantation, which he recanted as ſoon as he got out of the papal hands. It is the leſs wonderful that he ſhould do ſo; ſince the pope and his council appeared to have no very clear notion of their own doctrine, but blundered miſerably when they

they defined it, in contradiction to that which he had taught; and ſince GREGORY the ſeventh found it neceſſary, a few years afterwards, to define over again the pretended orthodox doctrine of the real corporeal preſence. He left out of his definition the circumſtances of handling and breaking, of grinding and bruiſing, this body between the teeth of the faithful, as I believe, becauſe they were too ſhocking to ſtand in it, and might be inſinuated with more advantage when the general doctrine had got prejudice on it's ſide. They have been ſo, they are avowed parts of it, and this is the doctrine which was declared orthodox eleven hundred years after CHRIST in the latin church, under the ridiculous name of tranſubſtantiation, a ridiculous name indeed, and that bears more analogy to chemiſtry than to theology. What HILDEBRAND defined, his ſucceſſors maintained: and INNOCENT the third, who was a pope of the ſame ſpirit, procured a moſt ſolemn confirmation of it in the numerous council of Lateran, which he held at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and in which ſo many other things were done to advance his own tyranny, and the ſuperiority of the religious over the civil ſociety. The folly of the holy war was renewed, books of decretals were publiſhed and authoriſed, auricular confeſſion was introduced, the cup was taken from the laity: in ſhort, eccleſiaſtical pride and policy being now come to their height, the whole ſyſtem of religion became more than ever a ſyſtem of uſurpation; and ambition improved, to her purpoſes, all that ſuperſtition and ignorance could be made to adopt. It will be no breach of charity, therefore, to affirm, that tho the doctrine of CHRIST's real and corporeal preſence in the ſacrament owed it's firſt riſe to the abuſe of figurative ſtyle, and to the diſputes of divines on another ſubject, yet the ſolemn definition of tranſubſtantiation was one of thoſe artifices, that the popes employed to raiſe an high opinion of the dignity and power of the prieſthood. No popes had ever more reaſon

ſon to raiſe ſuch an opinion than GREGORY the ſeventh and INNOCENT the third; for none ever atchieved nor undertook ſuch conqueſts as theſe two made at the head of the church over the civil power, both of them in Germany, and the laſt of them in our iſland likewiſe.

WE may ſay the better, that this artifice was contrived for the purpoſe I ſuppoſe, ſince the prerogative and power of making God himſelf is not only aſcribed, by the writers of your church, to every prieſt, but an argument is drawn from thence to ſhew how much reverence ought to be paid to an order of men, the leaſt of whom has a prerogative and power of which the greateſt earthly potentates cannot boaſt. But however this artifice was contrived and conducted, how impudently ſoever popes and councils impoſed, for an article of faith, what it is more impious to believe, than it would be to diſbelieve the whole creed, and however civil and eccleſiaſtical power united to enforce it, with all the fury of inquiſitions, it never could gain from the eleventh, to the ſixteenth century, in which it was rejected with a juſt abhorrence by whole nations, a full and quiet poſſeſſion of the minds of men in any country; no not in Italy; no not at Rome. They who had not the front to defend this monſtrous doctrine, and yet would not ſeparate from the church of Rome, had recourſe to the ſole expedient that remained. Far from defending it, far from maintaining it as an original article of chriſtian faith, they choſe to put the deciſion on another point. Many of the moſt learned and orthodox, long before LUTHER and CALVIN aroſe, had declared, that men were at liberty to believe, or not to believe, the manner of CHRIST'S preſence in the ſacrament to be corporeal and by tranſubſtantiation; but the popiſh doctors inſiſted, that this liberty ſubſiſted no longer, ſince the church had defined the particular manner of this preſence, in the council of Lateran.

Lateran. Thus they tried to change the ſtate of the queſtion, to deliver themſelves from the cruel neceſſity of juſtifying blaſphemy, and demonſtrating contradictions, and to decide the merits of a cauſe, that could not be maintained by thoſe of another that they thought might be ſo. In this, however, they were deceived, and inſtead of ſupporting tranſubſtantiation by the authority of the church, they ſhook the authority of the church by employing it to this purpoſe, more than by all the other unworthy purpoſes to which it had been often proſtituted. It was impoſſible to perſuade men, that the church had any right to make new articles of faith, and of ſuch a nature as this was eſpecially, under the pretence of declaring thoſe which the ſcriptures had impoſed on Chriſtians: and ſince it was impoſſible to perſuade, the ſame violence was uſed to force this article into general profeſſion, that was employed in the caſe of arianiſm. Nay more blood has been ſhed, and the calamities brought on the world by theſe conteſts have been of longer duration than the others. They are not yet at an end.

SECTION XLI.

What has been ſaid in this eſſay, and nothing has been ſaid which may not be eaſily juſtified, is ſufficient to ſhew, that none of the inſtitutions contrived to preſerve or reſtore peace among Chriſtians have had this effect even from the firſt. Thoſe that the apoſtles made, concerning which, tho men talk much they know little, had it not. If the diſſenſions of chriſtian congregations were ſuch as did not break out to the eyes of the heathens, all was ſtrife and contention within: and the ſtate of chriſtianity continued the ſame during thoſe ages, when the government of the church had firſt a great mixture of democracy in it, and when it grew up afterwards into a more ariſtocratical

ſtocratical form. The evils ſtrengthened under theſe forms, and grew quite intolerable under the monarchical. Under that government it became tyranny, and the whole ſyſtem of chriſtianity, which has been always making, and is not yet made uniform, became ſuch a ſyſtem of avarice and ambition carried on by fraud and violence in their turns, that new abuſes being ſtill accumulated on old, it might have been diſputed, whether chriſtian flocks would not have fed themſelves better without any paſtors at all, and whether the peace of the world would not have been provided for better without any religion at all. It may be aſked now, and I expect you ſhould aſk, in what particulars the ſtate of chriſtianity has been mended to the honor of religion and to the good of mankind, ſince the laſt expedient deſigned for theſe purpoſes was laid aſide by multitudes, and the pope was no longer the ſpiritual monarch of Chriſtians, nor the center of their union? The queſtion is reaſonable: and I will anſwer it very ſincerely.

I THINK then, that the ſtate of chriſtianity has been mended to the honor of religion and to the good of mankind, in ſome particulars, not in all: and that even they who remain in the papal communion have, in this reſpect, ſome obligation to thoſe who have ſeparated themſelves from it. That ſo many nations withdrew in the ſixteenth century from their ſubjection to the mock ſovereignty and real tyranny of the pope has been to the honor of religion ſurely; ſince the whole body of Chriſtians is no longer obliged to acknowledge for vicar of CHRIST every man, however unworthy his character may be, whom the moſt corrupt college on earth elects to that imaginary dignity, by a ſuppoſed inſpiration of the holy ghoſt. It has been to the good of mankind ſurely, that the independency of the church on the ſtate is taken away, in thoſe countries that have renounced all allegiance to the powerful abettor of

of it, the pope; and that it is extremely reduced in thoſe that profeſs to hold the ſame allegiance ſtill. It has been ſurely for the good of mankind, and for the honor of chriſtianity, to ſhew the world, that the law of God is immutable, like the author of it, and that orders, diſciplines, rites, ceremonies, and acts of external devotion, means invented by men to maintain and propagate this law, are not only mutable in their nature, but neceſſary to be altered, on ſome occaſions, in the courſe of human affairs. It was the more fit ſurely to convince men of theſe truths, ſince they had been led hoodwinked ſo long by the knavery of the religious ſociety, that they began to think there was nothing immutable in religion ſo much as the means employed to ſupport it, nor ſo little as the end. The wealth and grandeur of the clergy, and the ſuperſtition of the laity had been for more than fourteen hundred years the principal of theſe immutable means; and the experience of ſo long time had ſhewn, that the means deſtroyed the end. They gave occaſion to all that miſchief which atheiſtical perſons are ſo ready to impute to religion itſelf. Without theſe, diſputes concerning doctrines of mere ſpeculation would have made leſs noiſe and diſturbance in the world, and enterpriſes of ambition could not have been ſupported as they have been. To diminiſh all theſe, therefore, and to remove an authority which often has, and always may ſtand in competition with the ſupreme authority of every ſociety, are the firſt ſteps neceſſary to eſtabliſh true religion, good government, and public tranquillity.

As theſe ſteps were neceſſary, ſo they were juſt; for the wealth and grandeur of the church had been the free gift of the ſtate originally, and they might be reſumed, therefore, whenever they became hurtful, or even unneceſſary, with as much juſtice and better policy than they were given. As to

the other means, ignorance and ſuperſtition, tho every thing neceſſary to conſtitute them was promoted, they were not directly avowed like the others. To pretend that the church has a right to the former by compact, or by virtue of any alliance with the ſtate, would be to ſay whatever comes uppermoſt in a whimſical head. To pretend that the right to them is divine, may be ranked among a great number of abſurd propoſitions, that are affirmed without proof: and bold affirmation had ſucceeded ſo well in this caſe, that he, who had aſked for any other proof, than the authority of thoſe who affirmed it, would have paſſed for abſurd himſelf.

Again. Nothing can contribute more to the honor and advancement of chriſtianity, than to reduce the preachers of it, as near as poſſible, to the terms of their original inſtitution. Christ gave his apoſtles a commiſſion to preach and to baptiſe, to convert men by the miracles they wrought, and to edify and build up in the faith ſuch as they converted. It does not appear that they, or their immediate ſucceſſors, exceeded the bounds of this commiſſion. This was their ſole imployment. The ſole wealth they enjoyed, or claimed, was a voluntary contribution for their maintenance, in the churches which they viſited, or wherein they reſided: and how moderate this ſtipend was, may be collected from the practice of St. Paul, who took nothing from the Corinthians, but lived on what he earned by his trade. The ſole power they injoyed, or claimed, was that of reproving, and of delivering over to Satan, with the concurrence of the faithful, and not otherwiſe, ſuch Chriſtians as held falſe doctrines, or were guilty of enormous crimes. If any pious ſoul had foreſeen, whilſt chriſtianity was the religion of a deſpiſed and perſecuted ſect, that it would be the religion of the empire, that emperors and empreſſes, kings and queens, would be raiſed up by God to be the nurſing fa-

thers

thers and mothers of his church, we may aſſure ourſelves that great expectations of preſerving the faith pure and undefiled under ſuch patronages, and of infuſing univerſally the true ſpirit of chriſtianity after ſuch examples, would have been raiſed. But all the expectations of this pious ſoul would have been diſappointed, as ſoon as the event happened; for then, on the contrary, the church got, but religion loſt; the church was decorated, but religion was diſgraced; the cauſe of one, and the cauſe of the other, was never more united in opinion, nor ſo diſtinct in reality. The nature of that revolution which CONSTANTINE made in the religion of the empire, and the place which this body of men had held in the chriſtian church whilſt chriſtianity was the profeſſion of a ſect, inabled them to take the lead, and to be the principal agents in it. Thus they fixed themſelves at the head of the new eſtabliſhment. Religion was made ſubſervient to all their purpoſes, and the wealth and grandeur of the hierarchy were the principal objects of it. They were principal objects always, they were the ſole objects at laſt: and during ſeveral ages that preceded immediately the reformation, the whole ſyſtem of chriſtianity, in our weſtern world, was nothing better than a ſyſtem of eccleſiaſtical fraud, working by ſuperſtition and on it, under the direction of the biſhops of Rome. Many ſaw this: all who ſaw it, and were not gainers by the iniquity, lamented it. Was it not time to make uſe of the firſt opportunity, which a favorable conjuncture offered, to aſſert the rights of the civil againſt the uſurpations of the religious ſociety? This was done in the ſixteenth century. It had been attempted before: but the attempts had been vain, and even now they were various; for as eccleſiaſtics had taken the lead in eſtabliſhing, they took it in reforming chriſtianity. They preſerved much of their dignity, wealth, and authority in our church; leſs in that of LUTHER: leſs of the latter, in pretenſion and appearance at leaſt,

and

and none of the two former, in that of CALVIN. The conſtitution of our church ſeems adapted to that of a great monarchy. The conſtitution of the lutheran to thoſe of the little princes and ſtates of Germany. The conſtitution of CALVIN's to the government of a little and poor republic. But popery was renounced in all, the ſuperſtitions of it were aboliſhed, and that ſpiritual tyrant was ſuffered no longer to encroach on civil ſovereignty, nor to drain the wealth of theſe reformed nations into his coffers.

ANOTHER inſtance wherein the reformation has mended the ſtate of chriſtianity, to the honor of religion, and to the good of mankind, is this. Chriſtianity retained it's name, as factions often do when they have abandoned the principles that gained them reputation, or have perverted the beſt to the worſt purpoſes, becauſe the church of Rome profeſſed to believe CHRIST to have been the ſon of God, the Meſſiah, the redeemer: but then, human authority had ſo controuled divine in the courſe of many ages, and had been blended with it ſo indiſcriminately to the obſervation of men who were forbid to conſult one, and were taught the duty of being implicit to the other, that this religion was no longer to be found in the goſpel, but in the canons of councils, the opinions of fathers, and the decrees of popes; authorities that muſt be contemptible in the eyes of every one who knows what councils, fathers, and popes have been, and who knows beſides, that many of theſe canons, opinions, and decrees are either fictitious or corrupted. The firſt preachers of chriſtianity could not have known it again. Many articles of faith muſt have appeared to them new; they would not have acknowledged many precepts to be evangelical, nor many inſtitutions and ceremonies to be apoſtolical. They would have occaſion often to ſay, much what SOCRATES ſaid when he heard the lyſis of PLATO read. In a word, and to

finiſh

finiſh up the picture, neither PETER nor PAUL would have known how to adminiſter even the ſacraments of baptiſm and the Lord's ſupper, unleſs they had gone firſt to ſome ſeminary of prieſts for inſtruction. Now this new-fangled religion the reformation purged; tried it chiefly by the only true criterion of orthodoxy, the goſpel, and brought it much nearer to the plainneſs and ſimplicity of that which CHRIST inſtituted *.

THE

* I ſay in the text, much nearer to the plainneſs and ſimplicity of the goſpel of CHRIST; becauſe it would not be true to ſay, entirely. All the reformed churches renounced their ſubjection to that of Rome, and aſſerted their independency. But ſome of them retained enough of her inſtitutions, cuſtoms, and policy, to ſhew that they had been once members of that body. The churches who valued themſelves for going the fartheſt, and who thought that they could never go too far, in oppoſition to that of Rome, calviniſts abroad, and their diſciples our puritans at home, threw off at once, with the outward pomp of the eccleſiaſtical order, even the decency of forms in the public worſhip. But then they aſſumed as great a licence in the interpretation of ſcripture, as ever had been taken, and exerciſed as real an eccleſiaſtical tyranny, under another diſcipline, as the roman clergy had ever exerciſed. By affecting to deduce their reformation from the moſt early times, when gifts of the ſpirit were ſuppoſed to be common, they ran into enthuſiaſm; and genuine chriſtianity took as many forms as whimſical teachers could invent. Our engliſh reformers purſued a middle courſe. They retained much more of the hierarchical order; and when they had rejected many of thoſe ſuperſtitious rites and ceremonies, which VIGILANTIUS, a pious and learned Spaniard, had cenſured, and which JEROM, an impudent and ſcurrilous [a] Hungarian, had defended a thouſand years before, with all the ferocity of a modern Huſſar, they thought it proper to go no farther, or very little farther, in this part of reformation, and fell, I think, into a great abſurdity in another. In that, I mean, which concerns the doctrines of artificial theology grafted on chriſtianity by this very JEROM, and by the other fathers who went before him, as well as by thoſe who followed after him, ſome in the third, others in the fourth and fifth centuries; when that art of enſlaving mankind with words, to uſe an expreſſion of my lord BACON, was eſtabliſhed: and when that, which this great man applies to philoſophical knowledge, might be ſaid truly of theological, that it became "an undigeſted heap and collection of much faith and accident, "mixed with an abundance of childiſh notions imbibed in youth.

IF we conſider what motives our reformers, who boaſted of reſtoring the purity of chriſtianity, could have to keep open thoſe ſprings from which ſo much of the im-

[a] N. B. ERASMUS would make JEROM almoſt an Italian, becauſe Stridon, the place of his birth, was not far from Italy. But he may be reckoned more properly an Hungarian; ſince this place was on the very confines of Hungary and Dalmatia.

purity

The honor of his religion, ſo altered, ſo abuſed, and ſo defaced, required certainly that it ſhould be ſtripped of many rites, ceremonies, and cuſtoms which ſavored too ſtrongly of heatheniſm and judaiſm, or which had been invented manifeſtly with no other intention than that of multiplying ſuperſtitions, which helped to impoſe on the people, and were lucrative to the prieſts. The worſhip of images was of this number. A worſhip evidently derived from the heathens, as idolatrous among the vulgar, and not more eaſily diſtinguiſhed out of idolatry by the learned men of new, than of old Rome. Such again was the uſe of holy water, which your divines chooſe to derive from the water of purification in uſe among the Jews, and which might be derived as truly, perhaps, from the luſtral water in uſe among the heathens. Such again were the conſecration of altars, the celebration of jubilees, and other external obſervances, which had been ſo avowedly taken from the ceremonial law of the Jews, that your writers do not ſcruple to juſti-

purity of that church, whoſe communion they renounced, had been derived; we ſhall find, I think, that they were two; antient prejudices, and future hopes. They were averſe to unlearn what they had been learning all their lives; and they were deſirous to retain that pre-eminence, authority, and wealth, which they had enjoyed under the pope, and hoped to enjoy under the king. The church of Rome acts conſiſtently, when ſhe maintains a veneration for the primitive fathers, who maintained the divine inſtitution of an eccleſiaſtical order, and who invented ſo much ſuperſtitious worſhip, and ſo many ſham miracles, to eſtabliſh a ſham chriſtianity. But what could proteſtants mean to maintain the authority of theſe antient fathers, if they had not all the ſame purpoſes to ſerve? Let us acknowledge the truth. They had them not in the whole, but they had them in part: and for this reaſon they found it neceſſary to preſerve the credit of fathers and councils, in part at leaſt, and as far, as they wanted their authority. When they wanted it no longer, or when it turned againſt them, they laid it aſide moſt prudently. They builded up a new church, or modelled an old one, on principles, however inconſiſtent, that reconciled, in good meaſure, the eccleſiaſtical to the civil policy of their age and country: and they, who thought that an hierarchy and a monarchy were neceſſary to ſupport one another, which was the prevalent opinion of thoſe times, could not have deſired a more reaſonable inſtitution, than that which our engliſh reformers made, under the direction, and by the authority of the civil power.

fy

fy them by paſſages of the pentateuch. In fine, and to quote an inſtance or two of the ſecond ſort; ſuch was the invention of purgatory, and of all the coſtly means to be delivered from it. Such was the abuſe they made even of tranſubſtantiation, which is ſo great an abuſe in itſelf that one would hardly think it could be abuſed by any additional circumſtances, when it was eſtabliſhed not only that prieſts could make God at any time, but that they might carry him about in a little box, wherever his preſence was deemed neceſſary for public ſhew, or private devotion.

As the reformation exploded the doctrines relative to theſe and other ſuperſtitious practices, ſo would it have been much to the good of mankind, as well as to the honor of chriſtianity, if ſilence on ſeveral others, which cauſe great diſſenſion, had been impoſed at the ſame time. But the contrary happened. The reformed fell out among themſelves, and purſued one another with ſo much bitterneſs, that they gave no ſmall color to the pretended catholics, to object to them that they multiplied ſchiſms, broke the bands of chriſtian charity, and diſturbed the peace of the chriſtian world, which was better preſerved in the communion of Rome. I do not mean to ſpeak here of the diſputes that aroſe among the reformed about religious ceremonies and church-government, which were eaſy enough to be determined, or indifferent enough to be compounded, in their nature; how hard ſoever, or how important ſoever eccleſiaſtical obſtinacy and the ſpirit of party made them appear. I mean to ſpeak of thoſe diſputes that are in their nature not determinable; becauſe there neither is, nor can be, any real determination of ideas about them: diſputes that would be little thought of, or could do little hurt, if they remained undecided, and have done ſo much by dogmatical and contrary deciſions. I might inſtance in ſeveral, in that of juſtification parti-

cularly, and of the doctrines dependent on it, concerning all which ſo much unintelligible jargon has been vainly employed by popiſh and proteſtant divines, and to as little purpoſe by the council of Trent. But I chooſe rather to inſtance in the caſe of the Lord's ſupper. Of this we have ſpoken already, and it will ſerve better than any caſe leſs known, to ſhew in what manner the reformers raiſed new diſputes, left their followers expoſed to all the miſchief which theological queſtions have brought on the world, and the atheiſtical objection as much in force as it was before the reformation they made.

THEY were not content, then, to have rendered tranſubſtantiation as ridiculous and odious as it deſerves to be eſteemed: they went about to explain, each in his own way, this ſuppoſed or real myſtery. They who believed there was no myſtery in the euchariſty itſelf, how myſterious ſoever the occaſion of this inſtitution and the ſpiritual effects of it might be, ſhould have talked, I think, of the bread as bread, and of the wine as wine, which Chriſtians ate and drank in their communion to commemorate, by this ceremony, the death of CHRIST, and the redemption of mankind. They who believed there was a myſtery in the euchariſty itſelf, and that the bread and wine were, after thankſgiving or conſecration, ſomething more than bread and wine, nor barely ſigns or ſymbols of the body and blood of CHRIST, ſhould have avoided all definitions, inſtead of oppoſing definition to definition, and making that a myſtery which CHRIST had not made ſo. But they proceeded in a manner very different. They all acknowledged, if ZWINGLIUS did, that the body and blood of CHRIST were truly received in this ſacrament, as the landgrave of Heſſe declared to GRANVELLE and others in a ſolemn conference at Spire *: and

* Vid. SLEIDAN l. 17.

by

by this acknowledgment they put themſelves under inextricable difficulties. LUTHER taught that the body and blood of CHRIST were really in the elements of bread and wine, by a conſubſtantiation, which was ſaid to laſt, if I miſtake not, during the manducation only. Did the calviniſts talk a whit more intelligibly when they profeſſed at the famous conference at Poiſſy, "that in the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper, CHRIST gives, "preſents, and exhibits to us really the ſubſtance of his body and "blood: that by faith we receive, really and in fact, the true "and natural body and blood of CHRIST, by virtue of the holy "ghoſt*?" What did BEZA mean when he talked of eating with the mouth of faith? He muſt mean that he believed that he ate, or he muſt mean nothing? Now what did he believe, that he ate in the ſame ſacrament? Not the ſymbolical body of CHRIST; for he affirmed that he ate the true and natural body: not the true and natural body of CHRIST; for he affirmed that to be in heaven and no where elſe. What then did he believe that he ate, or what other ſenſe can be put on thoſe words, "eating with the mouth of faith," and thoſe "receiving by faith," than that of believing he ate, and believing he received? His adverſaries held a great impiety, but they held it conſiſtently. According to them, the body of CHRIST was in the ſacrament by the charm of conſecration, and they ate it when they ate the ſacramental bread. According to BEZA and his collegues, the body of CHRIST was not there but in heaven, and yet they ate it too, really and in fact. This conference broke up abruptly. The fools on one ſide accuſed the proteſtants of blaſpheming when they deny tranſubſtantiation, juſt as the heathen reputed thoſe philoſophers atheiſts who were not polytheiſts. The fools on the other remained convinced that they ate, ſpiritually and with the mouth of faith, in this ſacrament, a bodily ſubſtance that was not there; whilſt they ate moſt corporeally a bodily

* AUBIGNY hiſt. univerſ. l. 2.

ſubſtance, the bread, that was there. Both went away reſolved to cut the throats of one another: and ſuch are the effects of theology, that is, of human authority in matters of religion.

THIS authority has impoſed chiefly, when it has impoſed, on the minds of men, by the abuſe of words. This abuſe of words makes the ſum of metaphyſics and theology, imaginary ſciences, removed from the controul, as from the aſſiſtance, of ſenſe, converſant about hypothetical natures, and about ideas vaſtly complicated and perplexed. Such theology tinctured all the philoſophy of PLATO. Logic all that of ARISTOTLE. Theſe two ſchools were the great mints of inſignificant terms; and tho ZENO, who did little elſe than invent new words, and change the application of old, opened another mint of the ſame kind, yet the coin of the two former has been alone current. The immaterial forms, the eternal ideas, and all the incorporeal eſſences of PLATO, for inſtance, were given and received in every philoſophical payment, like the ſubſtantial forms, the intentional ſpecies, or the entelechy of ARISTOTLE, till very lately.

I HAVE often thought that nothing could have happened more fortunately for the propagation of learned ignorance, than the ſucceſſion of the peripatetic to the platonic philoſophy; for tho ARISTOTLE oppoſed many opinions of his maſter, yet the ſubtilty of his logic has ſerved to cover both his maſter's errors and his own, on more occaſions, and at more periods, than one. No writings, certainly, were ever ſo mad as thoſe of the latter platoniſts, which contain the very quinteſſence of enthuſiaſm, and which are almoſt one perpetual abuſe of reaſon and language. Many of the chriſtian fathers came out of the ſame ſchools; and all of them uſing the ſame delirious ſtyle, it became that of chriſtian theology. We muſt not imagine, however,

ever, that the philoſophy of ARISTOTLE had no ſhare in framing the ſyſtem of this theology, tho that of PLATO had the greateſt and the earlieſt. It is true, that the original works of the former were unknown in the weſtern church, till the fifteenth century, when greek learning was brought into Italy by thoſe who fled thither after the taking of Conſtantinople. But ſtill ARISTOTLE was at that time rather ill known than unknown; for in the very beginning of the thirteenth a latin tranſlation had been made, by the direction of the emperor FREDERIC the ſecond, of ſome parts of his writings from the arabic verſion of them: and other fragments had appeared in the ſame language, ſuch as might be expected, in thoſe ages of ignorance, from men, among whom the latin and greek were become very barbarous languages; who underſtood ill the purity of one, and were little able to explain themſelves properly and clearly in the other. If we go higher up, we find ARISTOTLE much better known. He muſt have been ſo even by the firſt of the greek fathers, and his reputation muſt have been great during all thoſe ages wherein ſo many of the cornerſtones of chriſtian theology were laid; ſince he had commentators, themſelves philoſophers of great fame, among the Greeks, in the ſecond, the third, the fourth, and the fifth centuries, ALEXANDER APHRODISAEUS, THEMISTIUS, and others. No doubt can be made of this; and if any doubt could be made, thoſe nice diſtinctions, and that perpetual torture of words, for which fathers and councils were ſo famous, would be ſufficient to prove it. They learned of PLATO to talk without any meaning: and they learned, I think, of ARISTOTLE, to ſeem ſometimes to have one.

THE logical empire of ARISTOTLE, and the abuſe of words grew up with chriſtian theology; but they were never abſolutely confirmed till ignorance prevailed alike in the Eaſt and the

the Weſt, from the ninth to the fifteenth century, when the firſt dawnings of knowledge began to appear, and men began to ſee their way in the farther acquiſition of it. It may ſeem ſtrange, but it is true, that the ſchools which were erected, and the encouragement which was given to learning from the days of CHARLES the great, ſerved only to keep men out of the way of true knowledge, and to impoſe a falſe appearance of it. The popes had procured chiefly the foundations of theſe ſchools: and the encouragement to the ſcholars had been derived from them, or through their means. I might have reckoned this among the artifices they employed to carry on their uſurpations. Bare ignorance alone was not ſufficient to their purpoſe. It was neceſſary to promote learned ignorance, and to eſtabliſh error, with all the circumſtances of authority and reverence; leſt even the ignorant ſhould ſtumble upon truth. To keep men from the ſearch of it, they were told, that truth, and divine truths eſpecially, were hard to find; that perſons, on whoſe ability they might depend, were ſet apart, therefore, to ſave others the trouble of this ſearch, and that their holy mother, the church, watched over all. Thus revelation and reaſon both were made the monopoly of the clergy. They doled out the former in ſuch ſcraps, and under ſuch interpretations, as they thought fit. They employed the latter, not to analiſe, not to verify ideas, in order to compare them, but to take ſuch as have been mentioned above, as it were on truſt, like the vile inſtruments of error: the inſtruments of error indeed, ſince, how well ſoever theſe compariſons were made, nothing that was true, or complete and adequate, or diſtinct and clear, could reſult from them, and nothing, conſequently, that deſerved the name of knowledge. In ſhort, they profaned and abuſed the two nobleſt gifts of God to man, natural reaſon and ſupernatural revelation.

NATURAL philoſophy and mathematics made little progreſs in theſe ſchools, experimental philoſophy none at all. To turn and to wind the few notions they had a thouſand ways, to diſtinguiſh imperceptible differences, to refine and ſubtiliſe a little real knowledge till it evaporated entirely, and nothing remained but a caput mortuum of words, was their whole buſineſs. JOHN of Damaſcus had brought logic into faſhion among the greek divines, and BOËTIUS among the latines, long before the inſtitution of theſe ſchools, and longer ſtill before their doctors became famous under the name of ſcholaſtics: ſo that whenever this happened, the ſame manner of philoſophiſing on logical and metaphyſical notions, on technical and inſignificant terms, had prevailed in them from their foundation, and had been applied to theology. The men, who applied themſelves to it, had ſome broken and ſuperficial acquaintance with ARISTOTLE at ſecond hand, as we have obſerved that they might, and even at third hand; for much of it came to them through his arabian interpreters and commentators: and as in every other ſcience, ſo in theology, they were ſervilely attached to his principles and to his method. Some have placed LANFRANC, archbiſhop of Canterbury, at the head of the ſcholaſtic tribe, in the order of time: and if he wrote againſt BERENGER, in the middle of the eleventh century, we may aſſure ourſelves, that ARISTOTLE's philoſophy was employed then as it has been ſince, to account for CHRIST's corporeal preſence in the ſacrament. It has been ſaid, I know, that PETER the Lombard, a famous ſcholaſtic in the next century to LANFRANC, imitated and followed JOHN of Damaſcus; tho ERASMUS and others have made a doubt whether he was the author of that work, which procured him the name of maſter of the ſentences. But ſuch criticiſms are trifling as well as uncertain: for whether this writer, or his predeceſſor LANFRANC,

FRANC, imitated JOHN of Damaſcus or no; and whether PETER the Lombard, or ABELARD, compiled the ſentences, their theology was that of their age and of theſe ſchools, and their method was derived ultimately from ARISTOTLE.

THESE ſchools continued in great fame, and produced in every age, during the courſe of many, a multitude of writers, ſome of whom were men of ſuch extraordinary genius, that they might have enlightened, like ſo many ſuns, the orb of learning, and have carried human knowledge to the utmoſt bounds of human capacity. But inſtead of this, they ſerved, like ſo many ignes fatui, to lead men backwards and forwards through the briars and thorns of vain ſpeculations, within the narrow bounds that ARISTOTLE ſet, as if truth was not to be found out of theſe. They checked the growth of true philoſophy, by bringing into it no new materials from nature, and they corrupted true religion, by blending their philoſophical ſpeculations, and the vain ſubtilties of their logic, with divine truths. They thought that ARISTOTLE had left a moſt complete and perfect ſyſtem of philoſophy. But they ſeemed to think, that CHRIST had left an incomplete and imperfect ſyſtem of religion. To ſupply theſe defects, they made ſummaries of chriſtian theology, to ſay nothing of ſentences of the fathers and * tedious commentaries on them, of commentaries on the bible, of theological queſtions and caſes of conſcience, that are much larger than all the ſcriptures canonical and apocryphal, and in compariſon of which the goſpels, nay the whole new Teſtament is but a pocket-book: tho the pocket-book ought to contain every one of theſe folios, and none of them are excuſable for containing more than the pocket-book. I have touched ſo often already the abſurdity, and, as

* N. B. The expoſition of St. MATTHEW's goſpel takes up, I think, ninety homelies, and that of St. JOHN eighty ſeven, in the works of CHRYSOSTOM.

I think,

I think, the iniquity of ſeeking chriſtianity out of the goſpel, of making any criterion of natural religion but the works, or any criterion of revealed religion but the word of God, that I ſhould ſay nothing here concerning the laſt, if I had not often found an anſwer to it inſiſted on with a ſilly air of triumph, by dogmatical perſons in their converſation, and in writing. What do you complain of, ſay theſe perſons? Is not the ſyſtem of chriſtianity in the ſame caſe with every other ſyſtem of laws particularly? Yes; and that is the very thing I complain of. A ſyſtem of human law and human policy is the product of human underſtanding, and therefore incomplete and imperfect, liable to different conſtructions at all times, and fit to be altered at ſome. But this cannot be ſaid, without blaſphemy, of the chriſtian diſpenſation; tho it has been muttered by ſome divines, and has been ſtrongly implied by the whole conduct of the chriſtian church. What is made by man may be explained, ſupplied, altered, and improved by man. But has the word of God, ſpoken to all mankind, need to be explained by any man, or by any order of men, who have as little pretence to be thought inſpired, as thoſe who are not of their order? Can any human authority ſupply, or alter, and much leſs improve, what the ſon of God, God himſelf, came on earth to reveal? Again: is there no difference between my being led into error by human authority, which I know to be human, and by human authority, which I take to be divine? To take the laws of God for the laws of man, is impious. But is it leſs ſo, to impoſe the laws of man for the laws of God? Surely it is much more ſo: as one may be impiety without deſign, and the other muſt be premeditated.

It is notorious, that many great points of chriſtian faith and doctrine were firſt taught, or firſt determined, ſeveral ages after the immediate diſciples of Christ were dead, on the au-

thority of tradition alone, till there was a canon of ſcriptures; and on tradition and them, when there was one. The trinity, the coeternity, the coequality, in a word the ſameneſs of the ſon with the father, the proceſſion of the holy ghoſt from the father and the ſon, the fires of purgatory, and the real corporeal preſence of CHRIST in the euchariſty, to mention no more, were of this number. It was lawful to diſpute about them all, till the church had decided. Nay ERASMUS * is ſo indulgent as to doubt if it was heretical in ORIGEN, to make a queſtion whether "the ſon and the holy ghoſt are of the ſame "divine eſſence with the father, or whether they are only "creatures more excellent than all other creatures." After the church, that is, certain aſſemblies of eccleſiaſtics had decided and decreed, "poſt evulgatam eccleſiae ſententiam," it was lawful to doubt no longer, nor to diſpute about any of theſe points, "ambigere fas non eſt." They were become articles of faith. They were made ſuch then, by theſe deciſions and decrees. They were made ſuch then, by human authority. Not at all, ſays ERASMUS, or any other divine. They were made ſuch by the ſcriptures. Whatever is not agreeable to them, is not of CHRIST †; and therefore falſe interpretations of the ſcriptures are to be rectified by ſuch as are true §. Now thoſe which the church makes are true: and it is enough for you, and ſuch as you are, to believe firmly all that the church has declared to be neceſſary ‖. Roundly aſſerted indeed, but very fallaciouſly argued; for whether the interpretations of the church are true, which is aſſumed, or whether they are falſe, which is poſſible, the doctrines eſtabliſhed on them are eſtabliſhed on human, not on divine authority.

* Symb. catech. 4ta.

† Quod aberrat a ſacris voluminibus, non eſt CHRISTI. ibid.

§ Falſa ſcripturarum interpretatio verâ interpretatione refutanda eſt. ibid.

‖ Tibi tuique ſimilibus ſatis eſt ea conſtanti tenere fide, quae pro neceſſariis exſertè et expreſsè tradidit eccleſia. ibid.

The

The ſcripture is the word of God. The interpretation is the word of man. But beſides, I learn from that judicious and orthodox divine Mr. HOOKER *, and ERASMUS and others of the ſame tribe ſpeak to the ſame effect, that all the things neceſſary to ſalvation are not neceſſary to be contained, and ſet down in plain terms, in the ſcriptures. It is ſufficient that they be comprehended in ſuch ſort, that by reaſon we may conclude from the ſcriptures all things which are neceſſary; from whence I conclude juſt as I did before, that the great points ſpoken of have been eſtabliſhed on human, not on divine authority; deduced, collected by reaſon, or what has been called reaſon; not expreſſly taught by revelation.

THAT theſe great points of chriſtian faith and doctrine were not very evidently deduced, nor very accurately collected from the ſcriptures, may be preſumed from the diſputes that have been always, and that ſtill ſubſiſt about them. It might be proved too, that ſcripture is not ſo favorable in many caſes, nor more ſo in any one, to theſe opinions than to thoſe that ſtand in oppoſition to them; and that the only advantage which the athanaſians or the auguſtinians, for inſtance, have over the arians or the ſemi-pelagians is not an advantage which the ſcripture gives them. They derive it from the ſuffrages of particular men, whoſe motives were often not entirely chriſtian, and from the arbitrary dogmas of fathers and decrees of councils. Theſe opinions, therefore, that are become articles of faith, and that paſs for ſome of the doctrines which CHRIST taught, tho they are nothing more than inventions of fathers improved by ſchoolmen, may be quoted as ſo many particular inſtances of theological preſumption, and, I think, impiety †.

But

* Ec. Pol. lib 1.

† THERE have been ſome divines a little more modeſt than others, ſince there are ſome, I think, who have ſeemed aſhamed of their artificial theology, and have endeavored to excuſe, rather than defend the fathers of their church. The fathers,

But call it which you pleaſe, or what you pleaſe, the proceeding grew more general and more ſyſtematical in the ſchools that have been mentioned. They did not take this licence with particular points of doctrine alone, but with the whole ſyſtem of chriſtianity. They melted down the whole maſs with all the alloy that had been already added to it by others, and they caſt it anew with an immenſe deal of their own. They made it ſo voluminous, that it was no longer uſeful: and ERASMUS might well ſay, "quis poſſit AQUINATIS ſecundae ſecundam "circumferre*?" They perplexed it with ſo many bold and indeterminable queſtions about the divine nature and operations, with ſo many ſerious trifles, with ſo many minute queſtions about formalities, quidities, and other fantaſtical notions, that it grew contentious, and more than ever hurtful. In ſhort, they multiplied diſtinctions and definitions till their manner became

it has been ſaid, taught the doctrines of chriſtianity in their genuine purity, and affected to teach them no otherwiſe. The heretics forced them to abandon this pious reſerve, in order to defeat the deſigns of theſe men who attempted daily to introduce errors in opinion and practice. Now if this was their caſe in general, it may have been ſuch even of St. PAUL, who was the father of the fathers; and his goſpel may have been writ in the ſame ſpirit of contradiction and of diſpute. But it is impoſſible to diſcover, with certainty, on what points, and in what degrees artificial theology gave occaſion to hereſy, or hereſy to artificial theology; tho we know, in ſome meaſure, what the diſputes were, that aroſe in the chriſtian church. The doctrines that were termed afterwards orthodox, or heretical, were in their origin, no doubt, coeval, and both grew up together, till one outgrew the other. In general the orthodox fathers had no advantage over the others. If the former had recourſe to tradition, ſo had the latter: and the former were not, certainly, ſuperior to the latter either in learning, or in means of knowledge, or in ſanctity of life, great foundations of credibility in ſuch caſes as theſe. ARIUS, for inſtance, or NESTORIUS, to mention no more, were in all theſe reſpects at leaſt equal to ATHANASIUS or CYRIL: and whoever examines the partial accounts of one ſide alone, for we have none of the other, of all that paſſed in the diſputes that aroſe whether the ſon was conſubſtantial with the father, and whether the virgin MARY was properly the mother of God, will find great reaſon to believe, that the two heretics were not the leaſt reſpectable doctors of the four. Thus we ſhall be apt to think, if we conſult not only antient memorials, but the writings of modern divines, and ſuffer ourſelves neither to be amuſed by arbitrary epithets, and vague declamations, in which the modern imitate the antient fathers, nor to be perplexed by ſophiſtical arguments, in which they ſometimes imitate the ſchoolmen. * Ep. 329.

as unintelligible as their matter: and my lord BACON might have added ſcholaſtic theology to the ſciences that ſway the imagination more than the reaſon, ſuch as aſtrology, natural magic, and alchemy. If the firſt pretends to diſcover the influence of ſuperior on inferior bodies, this theology pretended to diſcover the influence of ſuperior on inferior ſpirits, by illuminations, inſpirations, and the internal action of grace. If the ſecond pretends to reduce natural philoſophy from ſpeculation to works, this theology pretended to deduce the duties of man from ſpeculations concerning the moral attributes of God, and to inſtruct him in the imitation of God. If the third pretends to ſeparate diſſimilar, and to throw out heterogeneous parts of bodies, to cleanſe ſuch as are impure, and to perfect ſuch as are immature, this theology pretended to perform much the ſame operations on ideas, notions, terms. Theſe the profeſſors of it confounded, and diſtinguiſhed, at their pleaſure, and like chemiſts or apothecaries made new out of old, old out of new, one out of many, and many out of one *. Nay this compariſon may be carried farther. The ſcholaſtic divines rendered their art, for ſuch it was, rather than a ſcience, as incomprehenſible as they could, that they might make a greater profit, and acquire a greater reputation by it, among the ignorant.

IN this manner, and by the help of theſe ſchools, a theological ſyſtem, which had no intention to promote the true and holy purpoſes of chriſtianity, was impoſed on an ignorant and ſuperſtitious world for the very religion which CHRIST had inſtituted, and his diſciples had propagated. The ſole intention, and the ſole effect of it was to eſtabliſh an eccleſiaſtical empire, under that ſpiritual monarch the pope, and his ſpiritual miniſters the clergy. This was the effect of that ſuppoſed al-

* ——Pharmacopolarum ritu, ex novis vetera, ex veteribus nova, è pluribus unum, ex uno plura ſubinde fingentium et refingentium. ERAS. ibid.

liance

liance between the church and the ſtate. An effect ſo natural, that he who pleads for any right in a church, or eccleſiaſtical order, independent on the ſtate, may be juſtly ſuppoſed to mean this effect in ſome degree, and under ſome form or other. The firſt foundations of this empire were laid in private, the ſecond only in public conſcience. To ſecure this empire, therefore, it was neceſſary to keep the firſt entirely and excluſively in the hands of the pope and the clergy, and whatever influence the civil power might, on ſome occaſions, gain over the latter, to take effectual care that it ſhould never be able to gain any over the former. Now nothing either did or could contribute more to this great principle of policy than the conduct of theſe ſchools. By wrapping up both natural and revealed religion, in the obſcurity of metaphyſics and of logic, they made themſelves the ſole judges of both. By ſending abroad their diſciples, under the characters of confeſſors, directors, caſuiſts, inquiſitors, preachers, they had ſure means of exerciſing their judgments, inſtilling what opinions, and raiſing what paſſions, the permanent and occaſional, the immediate or remote, intereſts of the church required. The firſt duty of the religion theſe doctors propagated was to believe what the church believed: and what the church believed, they alone had a right to declare. The ſecond duty of this religion was to obſerve all the ceremonies, and to perform all the external acts of devotion and worſhip, that the church had inſtituted, or ſhould inſtitute. The third and leaſt was the practice of morality. On the firſt there was no mitigation nor indulgence. Men were to believe implicitly, or to be treated as enemies to God and to his church in this world, and to be damned eternally in the other. On the ſecond and the third much indulgence was ſhewn. It was even profuſe on the third. Compoſitions with the church might be made on both, on the breach of her own laws, and on the breach of thoſe of God and nature:

nature: and theſe compoſitions were ſo often pecuniary, eſpecially on the breach of the laſt, that whilſt the church was enriched, no layman, who had money enough to ſave his ſoul, could be damned. But there was ſomething ſtill more favorable to vice in the laſt caſe. The duties which the church exacted were ſo particular, that they could not, and they coſt ſo little to perform, that they did not, deſerve to be explained away. But the duties of morality were more general, and more liable, by variety of circumſtances, to different modifications, in the application of them, as they were much harder to be obſerved ſtrictly amidſt the infirmities of human nature. Caſuiſts therefore interpoſed. They lightened the burden in favor of theſe infirmities, by all the definitions, diſtinctions, and exceptions that logic could furniſh. They did more. In all caſes where the church was concerned, they gave full range to the paſſions of mankind. Juſtice was no longer a moral virtue. Faith was not to be kept with heretics. Benevolence or charity were no longer principles of natural or revealed religion. Heretics or excommunicated perſons were to be perſecuted and exterminated with the moſt unrelenting fury: and I may defy any man to ſhew inſtances of greater inhumanity, and more profligate wickedneſs, committed by the ferocity of lawleſs ſavages, or barbarous nations, than I am able to ſhew of thoſe which have been committed, not only under the veil of this ſpurious chriſtianity, but on motives taken from it, and at the inſtigation of thoſe who taught it. By ſuch means, and with ſuch effects as theſe, was an eccleſiaſtical empire maintained during ſeveral ages, whilſt churchmen governed conſcience of every kind, and by governing conſcience governed the world.

The ſcholaſtics had indeed many conteſts among themſelves, that were carried on with great animoſity, and broke out ſometimes into open violence. Such, for inſtance, was the diſpute between

between the Thomiſts and the Scotiſts about the immaculate conception of the virgin, and that between the nominaliſts and the realiſts about the nature of univerſals. How could theſe diſputes, or any other, be determined among men, whoſe pleaſure and whoſe pride it was to diſpute perpetually, and who cultivated an art that was of uſe to no man in the diſcernment of truth, but might help the ſubtil dialectician to poſe even the man he could not refute? Theſe diſputes, however, were kept among themſelves, by the policy, not by the moderation of ſcholaſtics certainly: and as long as they neither rent the theological ſyſtem, nor ſhook the eccleſiaſtical empire, the court of Rome tempered, managed, and ſuffered them, notwithſtanding all the ſcandals they occaſioned, in the univerſities of Oxford and of Paris particularly. But as ſoon as our OCKHAM, the invincible doctor, began to maintain that the eccleſiaſtical juriſdiction ought to be ſubject to the civil, the nominaliſts were reputed heretics, and the realiſts alone paſſed for orthodox. There was as little union among theſe as among the others, and religion might ſeem to be more nearly concerned in their diſputes. But the great purpoſe, for which all theſe ſchools were erected, being the ſupport of the eccleſiaſtical empire, any doctrines that reduced, or weakened it, were the greateſt of hereſies. This happened in the fourteenth century, when WICKLEF went much farther than OCKHAM, and laid the ax to the root of a tree, which the popes had watered with ſo much care and expence, and which bore ſo much bitter fruit; ſo that if the impertinent philoſophy and profane theology of the ſchools took their riſe in our country from LANFRANC, RUCCLINE, SWINESHEAD, and OCKHAM, we may boaſt that ſome of the firſt and greateſt advances towards a reformation of both were made by men of our country likewiſe.

FROM

From the time that Ockham had ſignaliſed himſelf, in a public diſpute at Avignon, in favor of the emperors and the civil power againſt the popes and the eccleſiaſtical juriſdiction, the nominaliſts were not only more than ever oppoſed by the other ſcholaſtics, the ſcotiſts eſpecially, but ſo perſecuted by the court of Rome, and all the fautors of her uſurpations, that their whole doctrine was condemned by Lewis the eleventh in a public edict before the end of the fifteenth century *. The doctors and maſters of the univerſity of Paris, for the ſcholaſtics too, as well as the rabbins, had the title of maſters, were obliged to renounce the name with the doctrine of that ſect, and all their books were burned, according to the laudable precaution of the orthodox. The realiſts, on the other ſide, were recommended, and nothing was neglected on this and every other occaſion that might keep theſe ſchools firmly attached to a cauſe, which they had been principal inſtruments of impoſing on the world, for the cauſe of chriſtian religion. Theſe efforts, however, proved inſufficient. The papal throne was ſhook, and eccleſiaſtical empire was in a viſible decline. Scholaſtic divines had ſupported it in the opinion of mankind, as long as they were favored by general ignorance, even greater than their own. But as ſoon as learning began to dawn, towards the beginning of the ſixteenth century, theſe birds of night were forced to fly from day, tho they ſcreeched and clapped their wings for a while. It was in vain that modern ſcholaſtics proſtituted learning, as their predeceſſors had proſtituted genius, to maintain the credit of this theology, and the papal authority connected with it. The taſk was too hard even for the council of Trent, and for all the great men who have undertaken it ſince. Nothing ſupports the ſyſtem now, except general ignorance in ſome countries, and the force of civil, abetting eccleſiaſtical, power, on principles of political conſideration among thoſe who are not ignorant. Many a man thinks, many ſuch I have

* Morhof polyhiſ.

known, that the theology of the ſchools is abſurd, that the monarchy of the pope, tho reduced, is ſtill impertinent and hurtful, and that the abuſes of wealth and power in the church are intolerable. But yet, the ſame man will contend, that it is better to bear, than to attempt a reformation of evils that are grown inveterate, and will think that he is ſtrong when he quotes not only the diſorders, the wars, and the maſſacres, which attended and followed the reformation in the ſixteenth century, but the ſeveral ridiculous and mad ſects, to the riſe of which this reformation gave occaſion, tho the reformers condemned them.

I HAVE heard men of good parts and good intentions reaſon in this manner; I have heard it ſaid by a very reſpectable man in the gallican church, when he excuſed, rather than defended, ſubmiſſion to the papal power, that this power is the key-ſtone of that arch whereon the whole chriſtian ſyſtem reſts, and that the whole building muſt fall if the key-ſtone be taken away. I have heard another of the ſame church, and of the ſame character, advance, that many things abſurd in belief, and ridiculous in practice, were neceſſary to attach the greateſt number of men and women, and eſpecially of the vulgar, to chriſtianity; that men of ſenſe and knowledge aſcribed to theſe doctrines and inſtitutions as little as they deſerved, but that men of ſenſe and knowledge ought to conſider and diſtinguiſh what is for them, and what for the vulgar; that this cannot be done in outward profeſſion, but that every man of ſenſe and knowledge may do it for himſelf, and ſhould therefore bear with an uſeful deception. Much may be ſaid in favor of this political reaſoning, and much may be ſaid againſt it. It might have been better, perhaps, if it had been practicable, to reform, as ERASMUS would have done, than as LUTHER did. I ſhall not enter into the controverſy. But this I ſay. Such inſtances as have been given confirm the whole drift of this eſſay, becauſe they ſhew the miſchievous conſequences of theology,

gy, by which an order of men have been able to uſurp on God, if I may uſe the expreſſion, as well as on man, to propagate their own inventions for his revelations, and to aſſume an authority, to which they have no right, over all the other orders of ſociety; till the fraud and the uſurpation were ſo eſtabliſhed, that it was not poſſible to reject them without falling into ſome of theſe calamities which the eſtabliſhment of them had coſt mankind. A melancholy alternative ſurely, and yet ſuch an one, that the love of truth, the ſpirit of liberty, and an awful reſpect for the Supreme Being, ought to determine men to take their reſolution in it. When LUTHER and CALVIN, and the other reformers, took this reſolution, it muſt not be denied that affections and paſſions, and private intereſts, had their ſhare, as well as the other motives, in determining them to it. Such will be the caſe in all human enterpriſes, even in the beſt, and therefore the iſſues even of the beſt are always imperfect. Our reformers ſhook off entirely the papal yoke, they laid aſide and expoſed many falſe traditions and unchriſtian doctrines. But our reformers had ſome of the prejudices, and much of the ſpirit of the ſchools, about them: and he * was not in the wrong, perhaps, who made the ſcholaſtic chronology begin at LANFRANC and end at LUTHER; tho many of your divines and of ours have talked the ſame gibberiſh ſince, and talk it ſtill.

MAY we not compare the great revolution which happened in the roman church, to that which happened in the roman empire? The empire broke to pieces, ſome of the provinces became diſtinct ſtates, aſſerted their independency, and acknowledged no longer the imperial authority, nor the laws of the empire. But in all theſe new conſtitutions, there was ſome tincture of the old, ſome principles of law, and ſome of policy, which bore a near reſemblance to it. Thus, in the conſtitutions of our reformed churches, tho they were independent on that of Rome, ſomething remained to ſhew that they had been

* MORHOF Polyhiſ.

been once members of that body, as much as they differed now in doctrine and diſcipline. The church of Rome ſhut up the bible from the laity. The reformed churches opened it, and declared that the pure word of God was the ſole teſt of true religion, and the ſole foundation of theirs. That it is the true, the ſole, and the ſufficient teſt of chriſtian religion muſt be owned; for if it was not, it could not be the word of God, nor chriſtianity the religion of God. But is it certain, that this word has been made the ſole foundation of our reformed religions? I apprehend it is not. Nay ſince, to ſpeak properly, I muſt ſay religions, it cannot have been made ſuch. The word of God is one, and one religion alone can be taught by it. If there are different religions raiſed, there muſt have been different foundations laid. How are we to account for this? We muſt acknowledge the truth. Human authority has paſſed for divine, tho not ſo co-ercively in our churches as in yours, and the uncertain, variable word of man for the infallible, invariable word of God. We freed ourſelves from ſpiritual tyranny, and we fell into ſpiritual anarchy. The change, however, was advantageous; ſince there is, in the nature of things, and has been in this caſe, a tranſition, through confuſion, into order; whereas there is no immediate tranſition from eſtabliſhed tyranny into a ſettled ſtate of liberty.

Before the reformation, Chriſtians knew nothing of the bible more than the church told them. It might, and it might not be a rule to the paſtors, but it was none to the flocks. After the reformation, it was put into the hands of every one. The paſtors appealed to it, and the flocks were ſuppoſed to judge for themſelves by it. What happened? The very ſame thing that happened in the primitive church, before any canon of ſcripture was made by public authority, and received by common conſent. Various traditions and various doctrines of men, who pretended alike to the gifts of the ſpirit, divided the faithful,

ful, and every teacher had his followers. Juſt ſo at the reformation, various interpretations of authentic ſcriptures, and various comments upon them, divided the reformers and the reformed. Every teacher had his followers, and ſome of theſe affected to preach as well as pray by the ſpirit. Ambiguous and obſcure expreſſions in the text had the ſame effect as no text at all, and modern theology broke the uniformity of religion as much as antient, cauſed as much deſolation, and ſpilled as much blood. The reformed churches perſecuted one another, and your church perſecuted them all. Atheiſtical perſons, therefore, continue to take the pretence, which every religion gives them, to confound religion and theology, and to aſcribe to the former all the evils that are due to the latter.

It is natural to aſk, can nothing be done to remove this ſcandal by putting an end to theſe evils? I will preſume to anſwer nothing; unleſs men can be prevailed upon to aſſume the ſpirit of chriſtianity as well as the name of Chriſtians, and this will be found, I ſuppoſe, impracticable as long as the ſole care of religion and the ſole direction of conſcience is confined every where to a diſtinct order of men, whoſe diſtinct intereſts, and whoſe paſſions of courſe, carry them to keep theſe diſſenſions and feuds alive. If they were content to explain what they underſtand, to adore what they underſtand not, to leave in myſtery all that Christ and his apoſtles have left ſo, to a time that is not yet come, and to teach others to content themſelves with natural theology, and ſuch revealed theology as this; the evils ſpoken of would ſoon ceaſe, and the ſcandal conſequently. If they proceeded in this manner, there would be ample matter left to employ their tongues and their pens, and none to employ the ſwords and daggers of the reſt of mankind. The law of God would be a plain and conſiſtent law, and no color would remain for infidels to form this argument. "Either the ſcriptures do not con-
"tain the law of God, or it was not in the intention of God
"to

" to promote the peace and happineſs of mankind, or he did " not proportion the means to his end:" every one of which propoſitions is blaſphemy, and yet, as theology has corrupted genuine chriſtianity, it will be hard to evade them all.

But ſince ſuch a change as this may be wiſhed for by good men, rather than expected by any man, it is proper to conſider what can be done to leſſen an irremediable evil, and whether good policy cannot furniſh an antidote againſt the poiſon of theology; on which I ſhall ſay a word or two before I finiſh this long eſſay. There are arguments, no doubt, even of the political kind, and of irreſiſtible force, againſt atheiſts who reject all religion, latitudinarians who admit all alike, and rigidiſts who ſuffer one alone. If the firſt prevail, there will be no religious conſcience at all; if the ſecond, there will be as many as there are religious ſects in every ſociety; if the third, perſecution for religion will be made a maxim of government, as it is made in ſome countries, to the bane of ſociety, and to the ſhame of the chriſtian profeſſion. Do there remain then no means to prevent the fatal effects of theological diſputes, and eccleſiaſtical quarrels? Some countries are ſo miſerable, by principles of bigottry incorporated with thoſe of their government, and by the eſtabliſhment of inquiſitions, that there remain no ſuch means, but by the total extirpation of all thoſe who differ, or who are ſuſpected to differ, from the eſtabliſhed doctrines. In other countries, tho a rigid ſpirit prevails, yet if inquiſitions are not eſtabliſhed, and if eccleſiaſtics do not govern, it is very poſſible by ſkill and management to allay, for the moſt part, the ferments which theology is apt to raiſe in the ſtate, and to blunt the fury of thoſe who call themſelves orthodox, and every man who diſſents in opinion from them heretical. In countries where this rigid ſpirit is not that of the government, tho diſſenſion cannot be entirely prevented, the bad influence and effects of it may. To make go-

government effectual to all the good purpoſes of it, there muſt be a religion; this religion muſt be national; and this national religion muſt be maintained in reputation and reverence; all other religions or ſects muſt be kept too low to become the rivals of it. Theſe are in my apprehenſion firſt principles of good policy. The eſtabliſhment of a religious order ſubject to the civil magiſtrate, and ſubſervient to the civil power, not that of a religious ſociety pretending to be the allies and aiming to be the maſters of the civil, may be reconciled very well to theſe principles, and ſure I am, that they may be purſued, not only without perſecution, but without the invaſion of any one right which men can juſtly claim under the freeſt and moſt equitable government. The parliament of one thouſand ſix hundred and forty one declared, that human laws cannot bind conſcience; which is a declaration every ſect makes out of power, and none obſerve willingly in it. But be it ſo. Human laws, however, may and ought to exclude thoſe men from power in the ſtate, kings eſpecially, who profeſs a private conſcience repugnant to the public conſcience of that ſtate. Such men will make uſe of power, and the better men they are, the more to propagate their own ſchemes of religion, to ſtrengthen their own party and to recommend their particular notions about eccleſiaſtical government, which cannot be done without manifeſt danger to the public peace. The wiſdom of our conſtitution has therefore joined, admirably well together, the two moſt compatible things in the world, how incompatible ſoever they may have been repreſented, a teſt and a toleration; and by rejecting alike the principles of latitudinarians and rigidiſts, has gone far to prevent thoſe evils that gave occaſion to the objection of atheiſts: as I hope that I have done in this eſſay, to prove, by conſidering the nature, riſe, progreſs, and effects of authority in matters of religion, that theology has been always liable to this objection, chriſtianity never. Chriſtianity, genuine chriſtianity, is contained in the goſpels, it is the word of God,

it

it requires, therefore, our veneration, and a ſtrict conformity to it. Traditional chriſtianity, or that artificial theology which paſſes for genuine, and which we all profeſs, is derived from the writings of fathers and doctors of the church, and from the decrees of councils. It is therefore the word of men, and of men, for the moſt part, either very weak, very mad, or very knaviſh. It requires, therefore, no regard, nor any inward conformity to it. You have, I know, at your elbow a very foul-mouthed and a very trifling critic, who will endeavor to impoſe upon you on this occaſion, as he did on a former. He will tell you again, that I contradict myſelf, and that by going about to deſtroy the authority of the fathers and the church, which I reject, I go about to deſtroy the authenticity of the goſpels, which I admit. But if the dogmatical pedant ſhould make this objection, be pleaſed to give him this anſwer; that I do indeed admit the goſpels, not on the teſtimony of the ſpirit, like CALVIN, but on that of the fathers and doctors of the church, who not only bear this teſtimony ſeparately; but, aſſembled in a council at Laodicea, rejecting many other goſpels, made a canon of theſe: and yet that his objection is impertinent, ſince I may receive the goſpels on the credit of theſe men, of whom I think very little better than I do of him, for authentic ſcriptures, juſt as well as he receives the books of the old Teſtament, concerning which he has ſtarted ſo many idle paradoxes, for ſuch, on the credit of the Jews, tho he rejects their oral law and the fabulous traditions of their rabbins. Thus I ſhall conclude this long eſſay, wherein I have recalled the ſum of what I have ſaid to you in converſation, and which has, I fear, too much of the looſe and wandering air of converſation.

The End of the FOURTH VOLUME.

T below

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1388
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

LD
URL OCT 2 1991

REC'D LD-URL
OCT 17 1991

QL APR 1 9 1999

*DA
27
B63
1754
v.4
Bolingbroke -
Works

*DA
27
B63
1754
v.4.

SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
D 000 001 558

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES
LIBRARY